# HISTORY OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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## Guadalcanal to Bougainville

## The bloody step-by-step jungle battle

by a US Marine General

# HISTORY OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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# Planning 'The Way Back'

**Pacific Theatre, December 1941/August 1943**
*Dr Robert Coakley*

The Allied plans for a comeback in the Pacific were constantly subject to revision: the Allied planners had never imagined that the Japanese could fight as tenaciously —with counterattacks at the least expected moment—as they did on Guadalcanal and in New Guinea. Nevertheless, by summer 1943—with Guadalcanal firmly in Allied hands and the Japanese on the defensive in New Guinea—the plans to drive in the Japanese perimeter from the Aleutians to New Britain had been firmly laid. Now it was up to the men in their landing-craft

The cardinal principle of British/American strategy in the Second World War was that Germany was the primary enemy, to be defeated first. The 'Germany first' principle was agreed upon conditionally in military conversations early in 1941, confirmed by the President and Prime Minister at the Arcadia Conference in Washington following Pearl Harbor, and reiterated afterward at every other major British/American conference.

Under the shadow of this concept, the Americans planned and conducted their war in the Pacific against Japan. It was primarily an American war, though British Dominions – Australia and New Zealand – played an important part. In March 1942, Churchill and Roosevelt agreed that the United States should exercise strategic responsibility for the conduct of the war in the Pacific, just as the British would for the war in the Middle East/Indian Ocean area, while Europe and the Atlantic would be a combined responsibility. This arrangement gave the President and the US Joint Chiefs-of-Staff a large measure of freedom in determining their course of action in the Pacific subject to such broad agreed strategic concepts as the 'Germany first' formula.

The British generally interpreted the formula to mean that the Allies should stand on the defensive in the war against Japan, employing only minimum forces to maintain essential positions until the war in Europe was won. Inevitably the Americans, their national interest and pride more directly involved, came to give it a more liberal interpretation that would permit an offensive strategy in the Pacific as well as in Europe.

When the Japanese struck at Pearl Harbor there was no firm plan for a course of action in such an eventuality. Since the turn of the century American military staffs had wrestled with the problem of how best to cope with a Japanese attack on the Philippines. During the 1920s and 1930s they had developed a series of plans, designated 'Orange', that called for an advance by the Pacific Fleet through the Japanese-mandated islands in the Central Pacific to relieve a beleaguered army garrison in the Philippines and to establish American naval supremacy in the western Pacific.

'Orange' represented the classical US naval concept of how a war against Japan should be fought, but by December 1941 it was hedged about by commitments undertaken to support the 'Germany first' principle. American military planners in 1941 wavered between defending only the Hawaii/Alaska/Panama triangle and attempting to hold the Philippines. Actually, they hoped to deter Japanese attack by establishing strong positions. In the fall of 1941 they had made an eleventh-hour effort to strengthen the position in the Philippines, sending B-17 Flying Fortresses there in the hope that they would serve as a substitute for a strong fleet in the island waters.

Pearl Harbor crippled the main instrument of American military power in the Pacific – the fleet – and at Clark Field in the Philippines most of the vaunted B-17s were destroyed on the ground. In the next few weeks, practically all the forward defensive bastions that had figured in pre-war planning – Wake, Guam, Manila, Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore, Burma, and the Dutch East Indies – fell in dramatic succession. The gallant last-ditch stand on Bataan and Corregidor did something to destroy the myth of Japanese invincibility, but little to disrupt the Japanese timetable of conquest. For six months the United States was forced to fight the Pacific war almost entirely on Japanese terms.

Once it was clear that the Japanese main thrust was southward, not against Panama, Hawaii, or the west coast, the American staffs determined to reinforce General MacArthur in the Philippines. Since the navy could ill afford to risk its depleted strength in forcing convoys through the Central Pacific, it was decided to establish a base in Australia and attempt to support the Philippines from there. The next step was to secure the line of communications between Hawaii and Australia by garrisoning islands strategically located along the southern route – among them Bora-Bora, Funafuti, Tongatapu, Efate, Fiji, Samoa, New Caledonia, and Espiritu Santo.

### Springboards for US offensives

Relief for the Philippines, however, could not be pushed through from Australia any more than it could from Hawaii in the face of Japanese naval and air supremacy. The bases in Australia, New Zealand, and the South Pacific islands became the new minimum defence line in the Pacific and springboards from which offensives might eventually be launched.

Establishing this line absorbed scarce resources, particularly merchant shipping, that the United States had counted on for the Atlantic in case of war. For six months after Pearl Harbor the flow of American resources to the Pacific was practically double that to Europe. Although this disregard of the 'Germany first' principle was accepted at first on all sides as a necessary temporary measure, as the trend continued it touched off basic disagreements in American councils. The navy, with the redoubtable Admiral Ernest J. King, Chief of Naval Operations, as its spokesman, pressed for more and more troops to garrison the island chain and more and more Army Air Force bombers to provide air cover; the Army Chief-of-Staff, General George C. Marshall, sought to hold the line.

In April the British agreed to the army-sponsored plan for an early attack across the Channel against German-occupied Europe. As long as prospects remained bright for an early invasion, Marshall and the army staff contended that some risk must be accepted in the Pacific to permit concentration of troops in the British Isles. Admiral King, though he professed as great a devotion to the 'Germany first' principle as did Marshall, still insisted Pacific needs were more immediate and that to fail to meet them would invite disaster. General MacArthur's voice was added to the Pacific pressures when he left the Philippines in March and assumed command in Australia. MacArthur, having had no part in framing the 'Germany first' strategy, did not even pay lip service to it except as it came to him in the decisions of his superiors. King's and MacArthur's pressures, reinforced by the pleas of Australia and New Zealand, kept American deployments to the Pacific at a high level throughout the first six months of 1942.

Meanwhile, on March 30, 1942, after necessary international negotiations, the Americans announced new command arrangements in the Pacific. There were to be two main commands – the South-West Pacific Area including Australia, the Philippines, the Solomon Islands, the Bismarck Archipelago, and all of the Dutch East Indies except Sumatra; and the Pacific Ocean Areas, embracing the rest of the possible arenas of war in the broad expanse of the Pacific. MacArthur was appointed Allied Commander-in-Chief, South-West Pacific Area (CINCSWPA); Admiral Chester W. Nimitz Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas (CINCPOA). Each was entrusted with command of all armed forces – land, sea, and air – assigned to his area.

The shaping of the command structure evoked even more fundamental army/navy disagreement than did decisions on Pacific deployment, and the arrangements adopted represented a substantial compromise arrived at by Marshall and King in the interests of preserving harmony. Certainly both services recognised the desirability of unity of command in the Pacific after the misfortune of Pearl Harbor, but neither was willing to entrust its forces entirely to the control of a commander of the other. The prestige of General MacArthur and the confidence the Australians and New Zealanders had in him made a South-West Pacific command mandatory. Yet the navy from the start believed it should have overall command in the Pacific, as it expected the army to exercise command in Europe, and navy leaders were unwilling to entrust precious aircraft-carriers and battleships to MacArthur for use in the perilous seas north of Australia. They had no intention of dividing control of the Pacific Fleet, and King insisted that Nimitz should have direction of all amphibious operations in the Pacific – including those in MacArthur's area.

The navy gave way on the main point but secured important concessions. In the South-West Pacific, a genuine Allied command, MacArthur was denied direct command of any national component. In POA, essentially an American command, Nimitz was allowed to double in the roles of Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet (CINCPAC) and CINCPOA. In his role as CINCPAC, he exercised administrative control over all naval resources in the Pacific save those few permanently assigned to the US 7th Fleet in SWPA. Then Nimitz's command was divided into three areas – the North, Central, and South Pacific. Over the first two he exercised direct command, while in the South Pacific he exercised it through a subordinate area commander, first Admiral Robert L. Ghormley, later Admiral William E. Halsey.

The directives to Nimitz and MacArthur also differed. MacArthur was assigned an essentially defensive mission to hold Australia and adjacent bases, while Nimitz was told to 'prepare for execution of major amphibious offensives against positions held by Japan, the initial offensives to be launched from the South Pacific Area and South-West Pacific Area'. The directive clearly implied that all amphibious operations in the Pacific would be under naval command, and it contained more than a hint that, unlike the first offensives, later operations would follow through the Central Pacific along the route marked out in the pre-war 'Orange' plan.

In any case, the command structure provided no central authority in the Pacific itself to resolve conflicting claims of the two area commanders, and thrust that burden directly on to the shoulders of the Joint Chiefs themselves, laying the basis for all the future conflicts in Washington over both command and strategy in the Pacific.

The Battle of Midway on June 3, 1942, marked the real turning point in the Pacific

# Central Pacific drive? South-West Pacific drive? Or both?

war. The American victory demonstrated quite clearly that carrier- and land-based aircraft, not battleships, were the decisive factor in naval warfare, and severe Japanese carrier and aircraft losses forced Japan to abandon her designs on Midway and the island line of communications. The Americans could now consider limited offensives on the periphery of Japan's newly won empire.

In June 1942 the Japanese flag flew from the borders of India to the islands of the Central Pacific. Japan had established a series of mutually supporting Pacific bases stretching from the Aleutians in the north through the Marianas and Palaus to New Britain in the south, with outposts in the Gilberts, Solomons, and New Guinea. To supplement their strong position at Truk in the Carolines—a pre-war mandate—they had early in 1942 begun to develop a new network of bases centring at Rabaul on New Britain Island, the best harbour in the Bismarck Archipelago, with excellent airfield sites nearby. From Rabaul they moved down into the Solomons and New Guinea, establishing a seaplane base at Tulagi and beginning construction of an airfield on Guadalcanal—both threatening the line of communications in the South Pacific.

### Planning the Solomons campaign

It was only natural after Midway that the Americans should launch their first limited offensive to eliminate this Japanese threat in the south. On June 8 General MacArthur proposed a bold stroke directly against the New Britain/New Ireland area and requested aircraft-carriers from the Pacific Fleet to support it. The navy, unwilling to risk its carriers in the narrow seas around Rabaul, proposed a more cautious course—the first attacks should be against Tulagi and the move toward Rabaul should consist of a converging attack through the Solomons and northward from Australia. In the staff debate that followed it was easier to agree on the converging attack than on command arrangements, for the navy once again insisted that Nimitz should have overall control, even though the operations were to be almost entirely in MacArthur's theatre.

The final decision, incorporated in a Joint Chiefs' directive of July 2, 1942, was another compromise. It called for an immediate offensive to be mounted against the Japanese with the ultimate objective the New Britain/New Ireland/New Guinea area and outlined three major phases or tasks:

- **Task One,** the seizure of the Santa Cruz Islands, Tulagi, and 'adjacent positions';
- **Task Two,** the seizure of the rest of the Solomon Islands and the north-west coast of New Guinea;
- **Task Three,** the final reduction of Rabaul and the surrounding area.

Task One would be executed under the command of the naval officer designated by Admiral Nimitz as commander of the South Pacific, with MacArthur furnishing air and naval support. As Task One neared completion, command would pass to MacArthur, who would carry out Tasks Two and Three with South Pacific forces in a supporting role.

Guadalcanal, rather than Tulagi, was chosen as the main objective in Task One, and the assault landing was made on August 7. In the South-West Pacific, meanwhile, the Japanese had seized Buna on the coast of New Guinea opposite the important Australian base at Port Moresby and sent an expedition over the Owen Stanley Range toward that base. In countering the threat to Port Moresby, MacArthur was soon involved in the difficult Papua campaign against Buna—a necessary prelude to the further advances along the north coast of New Guinea that were to form part of Task Two.

The offensives in New Guinea and the Solomons were begun without realistic appraisal in Washington of the forces required to overcome Japanese resistance. MacArthur and Ghormley presented a joint plea to Washington, just before the Guadalcanal invasion, asking that all the forces required to reduce Rabaul be assembled before even Task One was started, but they were rebuffed. Once the battle for Guadalcanal was joined the commanders' fears were vindicated. The Japanese, operating on interior lines of communication from Rabaul and Truk, threw reinforcements into the battle and for four months tenaciously contested control of the sea and air around Guadalcanal. From August to November the issue hung in the balance and in Washington authorities almost daily had to weigh frantic demands for Pacific reinforcements against the needs of the war against Germany. With Admiral King again unhesitatingly supporting the Pacific commanders, Marshall found it difficult to deny army resources in an urgent crisis.

The July decision of the President and Prime Minister to invade North Africa at the expense of preparations for a cross-Channel attack made Marshall more amenable to Pacific diversions. The South Pacific got most of what it really needed—many more army aircraft, though not as many as King requested—and two more ground divisions, though MacArthur in his Buna campaign had to make do largely with what he had. By the end of 1942 the army had committed 150,000 more troops in the Pacific than it had planned to in April and, instead of concentrating aircraft in Britain for a combined bomber offensive, had sent more than half its air strength to Pacific theatres.

It was enough to swing the balance, but the margin was close and not until early December could the military staffs in Washington look toward further offensive moves in the Pacific with any degree of assurance. By the time the Casablanca Conference met in January 1943, however, the Joint Chiefs were ready to present a programme for the next year, though it was more concept than plan and served principally as a vehicle for demonstrating to the British the need for commitment of a greater proportion of Allied resources in the war against Japan.

The plan called for action in the Pacific in 1943 along three lines—the completion of Tasks Two and Three with the capture of Rabaul, a limited offensive in the North Pacific to oust the Japanese from the Aleutians, and an advance in the Central Pacific to the Truk/Guam line. The Pacific advances would be combined with an operation to retake Burma and reopen the supply line to China, largely a British and Chinese effort with American air and logistical support.

### US plans alarm the British

This ambitious programme alarmed the British, who insisted that no operations should be undertaken that would prejudice the defeat of Germany at the earliest possible moment. King and Marshall, presenting a solid front that concealed their own private disagreements, cleverly played off British designs in the Mediterranean against American designs in the Pacific and emerged with their programme only slightly modified: the Central Pacific offensive would be subject to the requirements for the campaign in Burma and contingent on release of forces after the capture of Rabaul.

When the US Joint Chiefs returned home they still had to work out with their own theatre commanders specific objectives, force requirements, and command arrangements. For the North Pacific, this presented few difficulties. An expedition was mounted against Attu in the Aleutians in May, and the island was taken after a bloody three-week campaign; plans went ahead for an assault on Kiska in August, and in the event that island was to be occupied bloodlessly. For the other, and strategically more important, campaigns in the Pacific, the Joint Chiefs soon found they had made too optimistic assumptions, specifically that Tasks Two and Three could be completed in a few months with forces already in or committed to the Pacific.

This optimism was dispelled when, on February 12, General MacArthur presented his 'Elkton' plan, worked out in close collaboration with Admiral Halsey, for a converging operation against Rabaul by forces from their two theatres. The plan reflected the bitter experience of Guadalcanal and Papua, calling for advance commitment of sufficient forces to assure success and for a carefully phased series of operations, each designed to secure a strategic position where air cover could be provided for further advances. There were five phases:

- **Phase One:** MacArthur's forces would take Lae, Finschhafen, and Madang to establish control of the Huon Gulf/Vitiaz Strait;
- **Phase Two:** South Pacific forces would capture New Georgia in the Solomons;
- **Phase Three:** Halsey would move into Bougainville while MacArthur invaded New Britain·
- **Phase Four:** South Pacific forces would capture Kavieng on New Ireland;
- **Phase Five:** forces from both theatres would converge on Rabaul. MacArthur presented no timetable, but listed the ground and air forces needed in advance, amounting to nearly 23 Allied ground divisions and 45 air groups—seven more divisions and 30 more air groups than were then in the two areas.

To resolve the problem of matching means and ends, representatives from the Pacific commands were summoned to Washington in mid-March to meet with the army and navy planning staffs. By squeezing here and there, the Joint Chiefs were able to offer additional aircraft but not enough to meet the stated need. When the theatre representatives were asked what they could accomplish with the means promised, they unanimously agreed that they could only execute Task Two in 1943 – that is, advance as far as the southern end of Bougainville in the South Pacific and to Cape Gloucester in western New Britain in the South-West Pacific.

This programme, embodied in a Joint Chiefs-of-Staff (JCS) directive to MacArthur and Halsey on March 28, became the strategic agenda for operations in the South-West Pacific in 1943. The troublesome command question, which had been debated since December 1942 in much the same terms as earlier, was settled by giving MacArthur strategic direction of 'Cartwheel', as the operation was called, although Admiral Halsey would be in direct command of operations in the Solomons and would look to Nimitz for the naval resources with which to conduct his campaigns.

MacArthur and Halsey worked out the schedule of specific operations for Cartwheel, 13 in all, during April, and the attack got under way at the very end of June with invasions of the Kiriwina and Woodlark Islands, Nassau Bay, and New Georgia. Next, MacArthur was to move against Lae, Salamaua, Finschhafen, and Madang in accordance with the original Elkton plan, and finally on to New Britain at Cape Gloucester while Halsey waged his campaign to secure the rest of the Solomons chain. With the whole campaign scheduled for completion by January 1944, presumably the final reduction of Rabaul would follow during 1944. MacArthur, at least, began to plan ahead for the further steps on the road back to the Philippines – an advance along the New Guinea coast to the Vogelkop, thence to Halmahera or Celebes, and finally on to Mindanao and the redemption of his famous pledge to return.

In Washington, meanwhile, Admiral King was determined to get a Central Pacific offensive under way along the lines of the Orange plan, despite the fact that he could not count on early release of the forces involved in Cartwheel. His determination was backed by the growth of a Pacific fleet whose main units, particularly the aircraft-carriers, could not be profitably employed in either the Atlantic or the South-West Pacific.

King soon got important support from the Joint Strategic Survey Command, a JCS organisation composed of elder military statesmen, who since August 1942 had been working on a long-range plan for the defeat of Japan. In its report, submitted in April 1943, the committee concluded that to bring about the unconditional surrender of Japan the Allies must first secure a foothold in China to make use of Chinese manpower and to gain air bases from which to bomb the Japanese home islands. The committee proposed an approach to the China coast along several routes – British and Chinese advances from India through Burma and China, through the Strait of Malacca to the South China Sea, and American advances across the Pacific. In analysing the two possible routes whereby American forces could gain access to the South China Sea – the one along the Solomons/Bismarck Archipelago/New Guinea line, and the other across the Central Pacific – the elder statesmen chose the Central Pacific line for the main effort with a subsidiary one in MacArthur's theatre.

**To breach the Japanese perimeter**

The Joint Chiefs did not approve unconditionally the proposed priority for the Central Pacific line, but they did accept the committee's concept of a two-pronged drive as a framework on which to hang their specific operational plans. At the 'Trident' Conference in Washington in May 1943 they presented the overall plan for discussion with the British and a scheme for specific operations in the Pacific in 1943/44 that outlined the first steps to be taken to fulfil it. The long-range plan was referred to the combined planning staffs for study, but the specific operations proposed were accepted intact. In sum, they provided for the same lines of action proposed at Casablanca – ejection of the Japanese from the Aleutians, seizure of the Marshalls, Carolines, and Solomons, the Bismarck Archipelago, and that portion of New Guinea held by the Japanese – with an added provision for 'intensification of operations against Japanese lines of communication'. If the programme was in some ways more modest than that adopted at Casablanca, it now rested on a far more solid foundation. Only the Central Pacific drive still had to be planned in detail.

Admiral King set out immediately after Trident to fill this void. The Joint Planners, at his instigation, prepared a plan for direct invasion of the Marshalls in November 1943, selecting Kwajalein, Wotje, and Maloelap as their objectives. Weighing the requirements, they felt that seasoned amphibious troops would be required for attacks on strongly defended coral atolls, and proposed that the 2nd Marine Division be withdrawn from the South Pacific and the 1st Marine Division from the South-West Pacific, along with necessary amphibious transport, some bomber groups, and naval units.

The cost to Cartwheel obviously would be high, and the proposals raised the question of the priority of the two lines of advance. MacArthur argued pointedly that the advance from the South-West Pacific toward the Philippines, firmly supported by land-based aircraft, offered a far less hazardous method of approach than amphibious attacks through the mandated islands with only carrier-based support, and he cited the Japanese failure at Midway as proof. Orange, he argued, had been outdated by the Japanese conquest of the Dutch East Indies and Malaya and the establishment of an Allied base in Australia.

The Joint Chiefs were not ready to settle the question of priority and they sought a solution that would involve the least cost to Cartwheel. Toward the end of July they found it by approving a less expensive first effort in the Central Pacific against the Gilbert Islands and Nauru, to be launched on December 1, 1943, with the attack on the Marshalls to follow a month or two later. The 2nd Marine Division would be withdrawn from the South Pacific, but an inexperienced army division (the 27th), already in Hawaii, would be substituted for the veteran Marine division in MacArthur's command.

In making this decision, the Joint Chiefs added a recommendation that Rabaul be isolated and bypassed, thus freeing forces for use elsewhere. South Pacific forces would complete Cartwheel by taking Kavieng while MacArthur would redirect his efforts, aiming at Wewak and Manus Island, to isolate Rabaul and make its capture unnecessary. Although MacArthur did not accept this scheme immediately, in Washington from July onward it became implicit in Pacific planning.

The decisions on operations along both Pacific lines were consolidated and extended in a timetable presented to the British at the Quadrant Conference in Quebec in August 1943. Target dates in the Central Pacific provided for the assault on the Gilberts November 15, 1943, on the Marshalls January 1, 1944, to be followed by an attack on Ponape in the Carolines (June 1), on Truk (September 1), and on the Palaus (at the very end of 1944). In the South-West Pacific, MacArthur was to complete the neutralisation of Rabaul by May 1, 1944, follow with an attack on Manus Island June 1, on Hollandia August 1, on Wakde (Dutch New Guinea) September 15, on Japen Island October 15, and on Manokwari (Vogelkop peninsula) November 30 – bringing both lines of advance to the approaches to the Philippines by the end of 1944. The JCS set no priority on the two lines but said 'due weight' should be given to the 'fact that operations in the Central Pacific promise more rapid advance'.

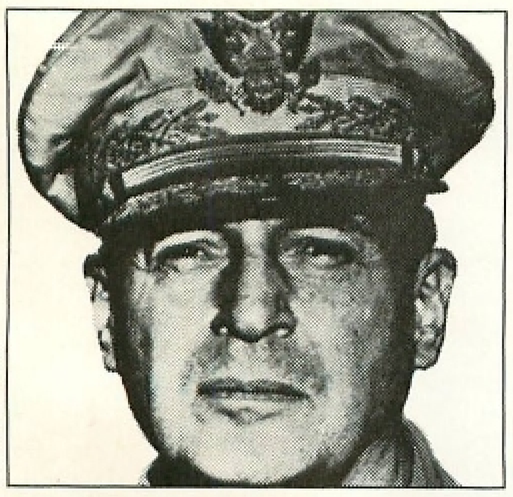
The British Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir Alan Brooke, at Quadrant made the last serious British challenge to the two-pronged American strategy in the Pacific. Would it not be wiser, he asked, to curtail operations in the South-West Pacific and concentrate on the Central Pacific advance, thus releasing resources for the cross-Channel attack? He met a solid front of opposition from Marshall and King and pursued the question no further. The American schedule for Pacific operations in 1943/44 was accepted.

This Quadrant schedule hardly represented the limit of American hopes for progress in the Pacific war by August 1943. With war production now reaching peak rates, the shipping shortage eased, an army of 7,000,000 men, and a navy rapidly expanding to meet needs in two oceans, the United States could at last face the prospect of full-scale war on two fronts with some confidence.

Though the long-delayed concentration of ground and air forces in the British Isles was, under Quadrant plans, to get into full swing in the months following, there remained a large residue of American resources for use in the Pacific. Admiral King already had his eyes on the Marianas as an additional target of the Central Pacific drive. In the broader sphere, the Joint Chiefs had made amply clear their intention to accelerate the war against Japan. At Casablanca they had agreed to a statement of the objective in this secondary war: 'to maintain unremitting pressure against Japan with the purpose of reducing her military power and attaining positions from which her ultimate surrender can be forced.' At Trident, over British objections, the formula was revised to read 'maintain *and extend* unremitting pressure'.

At Quadrant, the Joint Chiefs specifically rejected the overall plan for the defeat of Japan on which the combined planning staffs had been working and asked for a plan that would provide for the defeat of Japan within a year after the defeat of Germany. While no such plan was developed, the demand showed a new confidence in American ability to accelerate the war in the Pacific based not on any spectacular victories yet achieved but on the sure knowledge that the tide had turned and that American naval and air supremacy in the Pacific was now in prospect.

# THE PACIFIC DRIVE AND ITS LEADERS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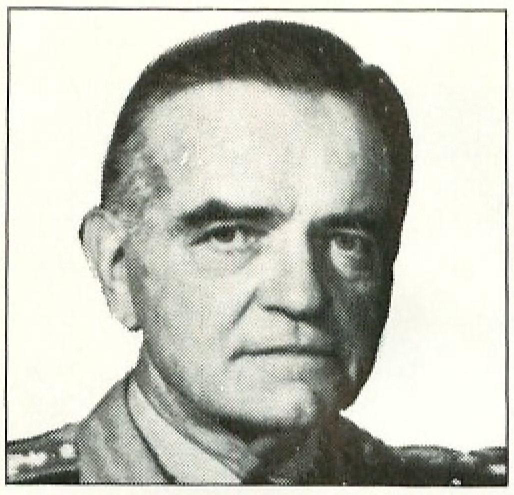
MacArthur was to flank Rabaul from the west, clear New Guinea, and approach the Philippines from the south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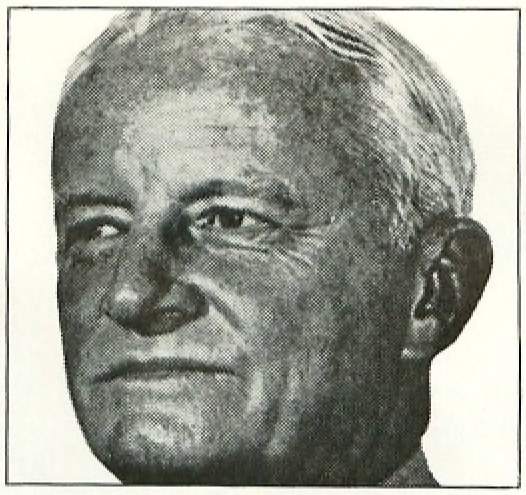
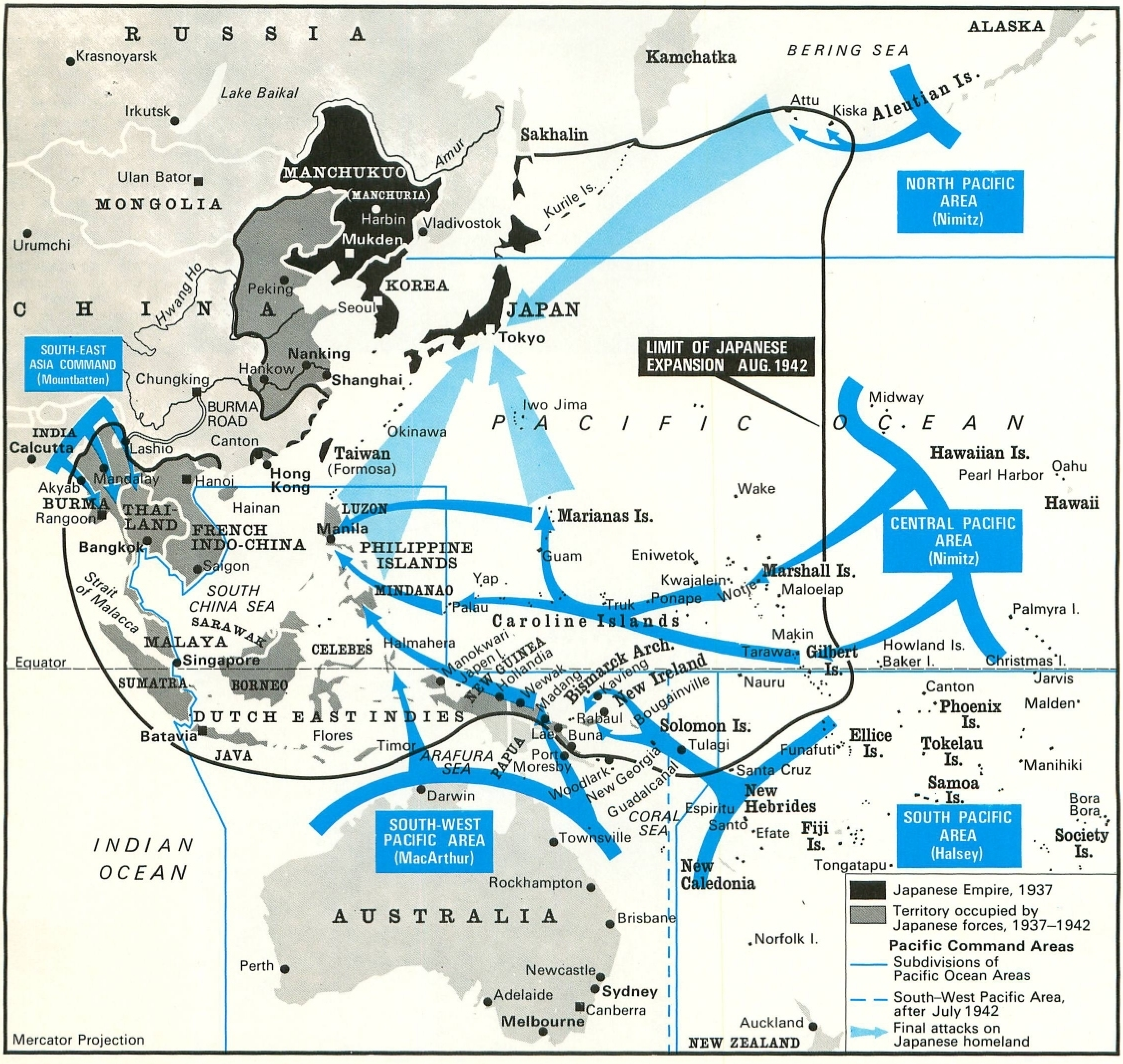
Halsey was to co-operate with MacArthur in isolating Rabaul, driving north-west from Guadalcanal along the Solomons


Imperial War Museum

Nimitz, C-in-C Pacific Areas, had to feed adequate resources to the other commanders while supervising the central drive

Paul Popper

King, representing the voice of Washington, insisted on the pre-war plan for a central Pacific drive to open in 1943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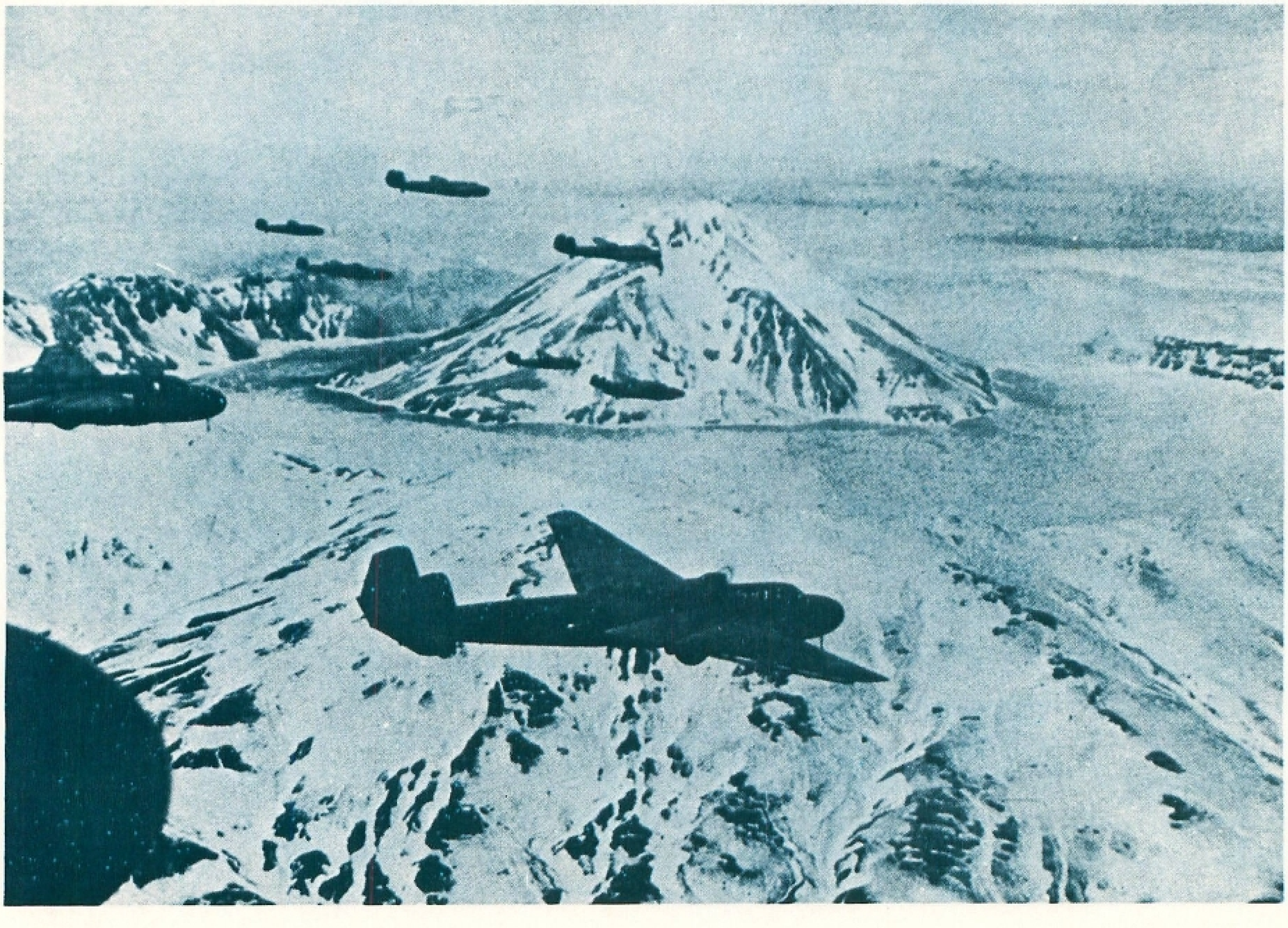
SOUTH PACIFIC AREA (Halsey)
Tongatapu
New Caledonia
SOUTH-WEST PACIFIC AREA (MacArthur)
Townsville
Rockhampton
INDIAN OCEAN
AUSTRALIA
Brisbane
Perth
Newcastle
Sydney
Adelaide
Canberra
Melbourne
Norfolk I.
Auckland
NEW ZEALAND
Mercator Projection
Japanese Empire, 1937
Territory occupied by Japanese forces, 1937–1942
Pacific Command Areas
Subdivisions of Pacific Ocean Areas
South-West Pacific Area, after July 1942
Final attacks on Japanese homeland

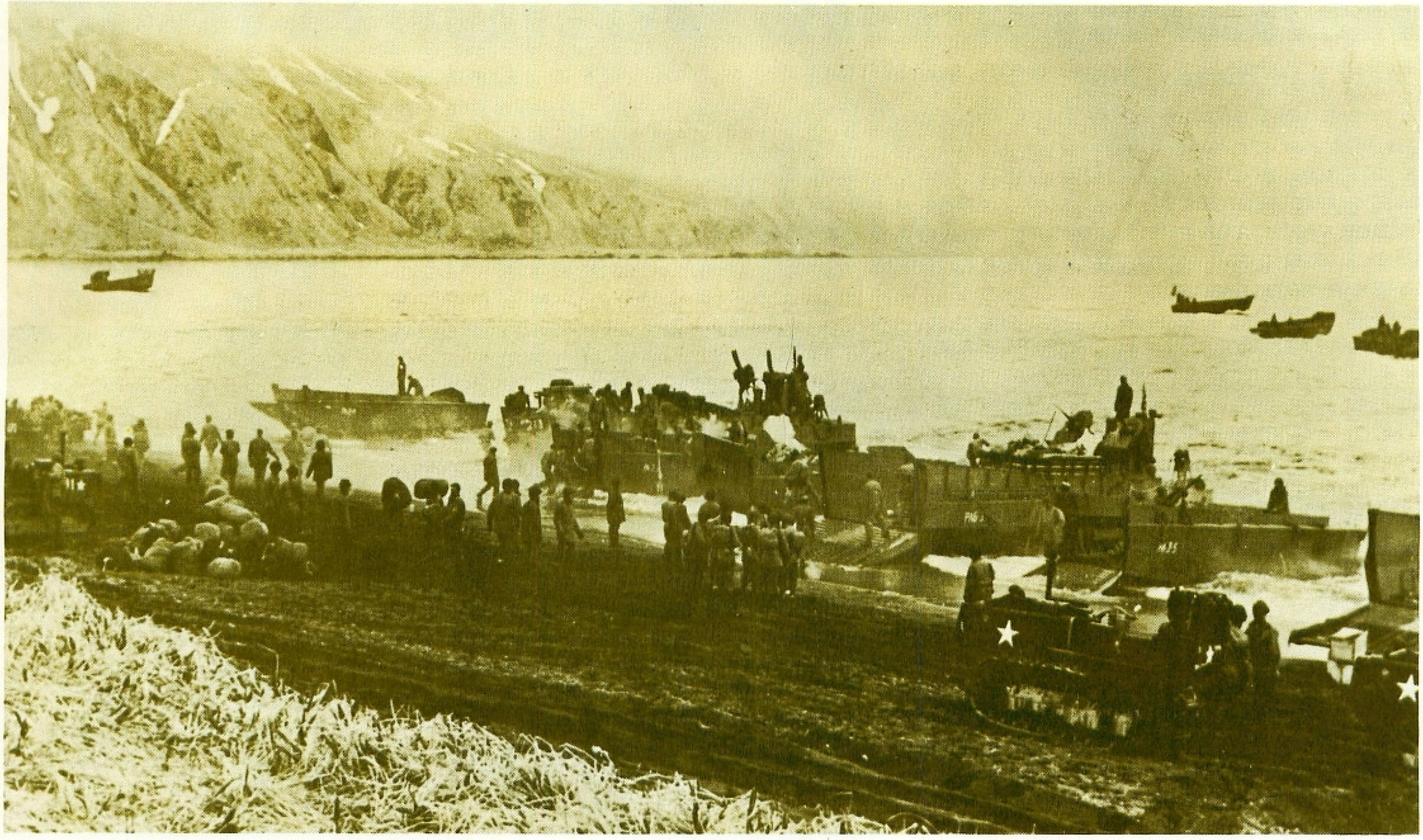
## Summer 1942: Japanese forces take Attu and Kiska; their empire now reaches the threshold of Alaska

◁ Japanese troops during the 1942 invasion of the Aleutians. *Below:* A group of Nell bombers, operating over the newly-captured Japanese islands of Attu and Kiska. Japanese occupation of the western Aleutians pushed the Empire of the Rising Sun to a limit which looked most impressive on the map—but the North Pacific theatre was justly regarded as a secondary sphere of operations by both sides. The Japanese *could not* spare enough forces to complete the occupation of the entire Aleutian chain; and so long as the eastern end remained in American hands, the Japanese could not exploit Attu and Kiska

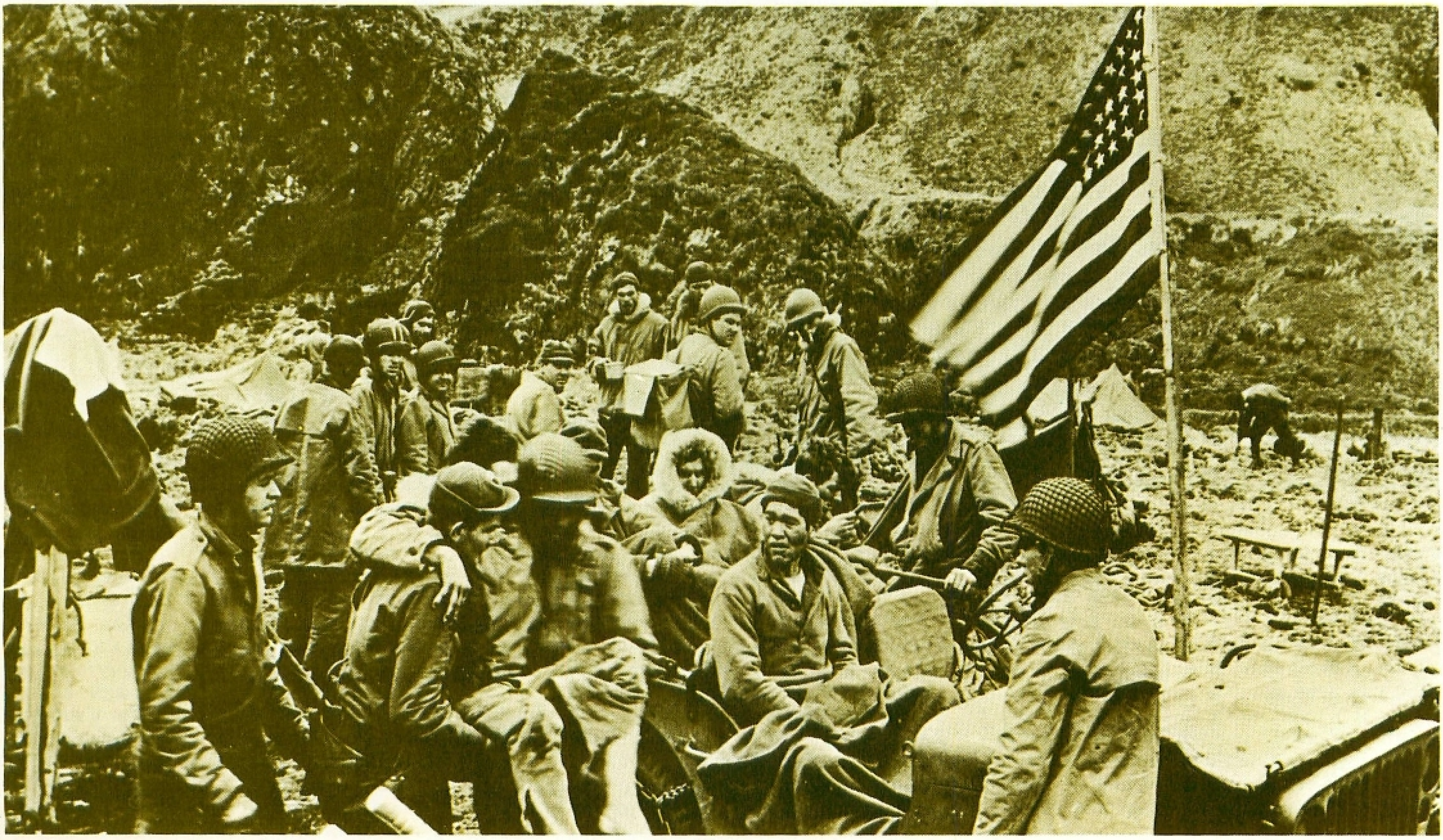


▷ May 1943: a US command post during the short but fierce fight for the recovery of Attu. The attack was carried out by Admiral Rockwell's North Pacific Amphibious Force, which landed the US 7th Army Division on May 11 *(top).* Attu was firmly in US hands by the end of June, and the Americans could now threaten Kiska from the west. The Japanese—as in the southern Pacific islands – refused to sacrifice *men in* a battle for a secondary island base, and foiled the Americans by evacuating their 5,000-man Kiska garrison under cover of fog. Now that the entire Aleutian chain was back in American hands, it was possible to build up the air bases in order to send aid to Russia

Summer 1943: US forces recover the Aleutians; the island link with Russia is back in Allied hands



Imperial War Museum



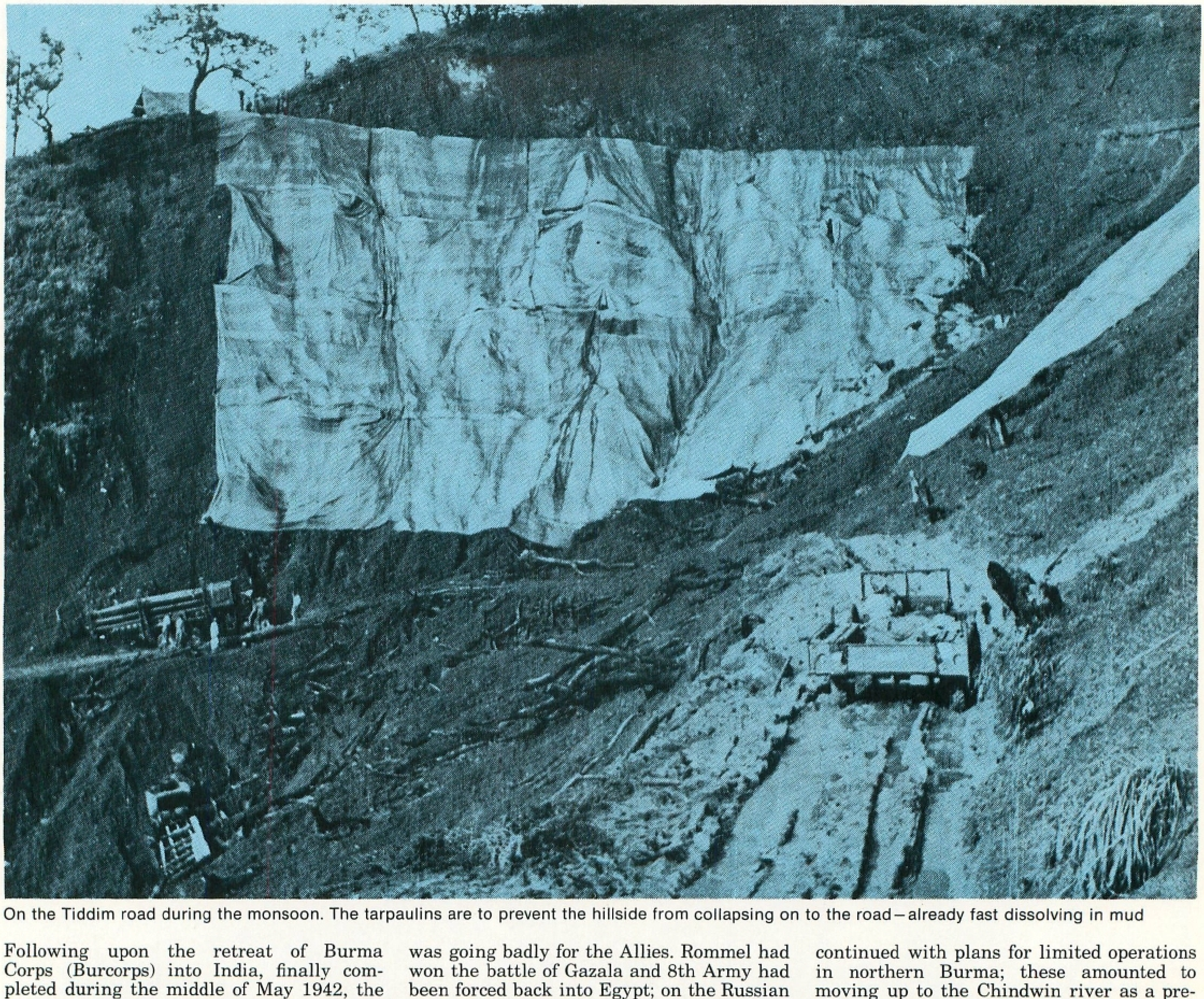
Imperial War Museum

# HOLDING THE BURMA FRONT

**India and Burma, May 1942/August 1943**

*Lieutenant-General Sir Geoffrey Evans*

Ever since Japan's entry into the war in December 1941, the Burma front had received the lowest priority in the Allied war effort, and India was virtually left to her own devices. She was ill-equipped to do so: communications with the front were chaotic, medical precautions and facilities in the eastern army were rudimentary—and the recent failure of the Arakan offensive had done little to restore morale. Much work was needed before another Allied campaign could be launched in Burma with any confidence. But by August 1943, under the dynamic leadership of Mountbatten and Slim, the bulk of this work had been accomplished



On the Tiddim road during the monsoon. The tarpaulins are to prevent the hillside from collapsing on to the road—already fast dissolving in mud

Following upon the retreat of Burma Corps (Burcorps) into India, finally completed during the middle of May 1942, the monsoon broke and—except for patrolling—a period of comparative inactivity prevailed on the Assam front (see map on page 1385). But this was not the case in India, where General Wavell, with the meagre resources at his disposal—particularly in aircraft—was considering plans for future operations. That these resources were likely to remain small for some time to come was obvious, since the war in North Africa and Europe was going badly for the Allies. Rommel had won the battle of Gazala and 8th Army had been forced back into Egypt; on the Russian front, the Germans had gained a number of successes, as a result of which a threat had developed to Iraq and Persia. This meant that Burma remained the Allied front with the lowest priority—and General Wavell had to lose some of his resources for assistance to other theatres.

Nevertheless, although any thoughts of reoccupying Burma (Operation 'Anakim') had been temporarily abandoned, Wavell continued with plans for limited operations in northern Burma; these amounted to moving up to the Chindwin river as a prelude to a later advance to the line Kalewa/Katha/Myitkyina, thus re-establishing a front with the Chinese. Furthermore, he was well aware that an early success against the Japanese, however small, was of supreme importance, since it would have a stimulating effect on morale in India, which had seriously deteriorated after the succession of Japanese victories in South-East Asia, especially in Malaya and Burma.

But before any large-scale land operations could be contemplated, it was essential to gain air superiority over Burma, and this demanded building forward airfields in eastern India to accommodate the aircraft when they became available. Construction of these airfields had begun in June 1942 and, largely due to the lack of materials and mechanical plants, the project was proceeding with exasperating slowness.

There was another factor, too, which not only delayed the work on the airfields but also retarded operational plans in general this was the attitude of the Congress Party in May 1942. In March of that year the mission under the leadership of Sir Stafford Cripps had arrived in India. The mission brought the news that the British government solemnly undertook to grant full independence to India if demanded by a constituent assembly – after the war. Following lengthy discussions, during which the counter-proposals put up by the Congress were quite unacceptable, and Congress having rejected the British government's proposals outright, the mission failed in its object.

A lull ensued and then, on July 14, the Working Committee of the All-India Congress Party passed a resolution demanding the immediate withdrawal of British rule in India and threatening a widespread struggle on non-violent lines. This resolution was confirmed on August 8 at a meeting in Bombay of the All-India Congress Party and, at 1 o'clock on the following morning, Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru, and other prominent leaders were arrested; with the exception of Gandhi, who was accorded special considerate treatment, the remainder were put into a special train and taken to confinement in Ahmednagar Fort.

Within 48 hours, eastern India and Madras were ablaze with mob violence, arson, murder, and sabotage, mainly directed at such government installations as the railways, post offices, telegraph communications, and the police. The areas most affected were those having the highest strategic importance, since many lay on the main lines of communication to the troops defending the Eastern Frontier and to those coastal areas most liable to attack by the Japanese. The outcome was that a number of places became isolated through the sabotage of the main railway lines and the narrow-gauge railways feeding Assam.

Government reaction was swift, but it was not until nearly 60 battalions of infantry, together with a number of aircraft of the Royal Air Force, had been employed in aid of the civil power that the situation was brought under control. Meanwhile, six valuable weeks had been lost. Besides retarding the work on the airfields, the training of formations destined to fight the Japanese had been delayed and the output of factories producing war material had been considerably affected. At one time it was suspected that these civil disorders had broken out with Japanese connivance, but this was not so, and, if they were ever aware of the disorders, they did not take advantage of the situation. Thus a crisis which might have led to extremely serious consequences was averted.

In addition, there was trouble both in Sind and on the North-West Frontier which needed the employment of troops for several months before order could be restored. In Sind, a fiery Moslem sect, the Hurs, had terrorised the countryside for a long time, and when they resorted to the derailment of trains martial law was declared. But so difficult was the country that it was all of six months before an end was put to their activities. To quell the rising on the North-West Frontier inspired by the notorious Fakir of Ipi, punitive columns of far greater strength than the tribesmen involved were required; nevertheless, the show of force and the rapidity with which peace was restored had such an effect that from then onwards the frontier remained quiet

**Malaria takes its toll**

Medical science and a high standard of hygiene have reduced death-dealing diseases to a low rate in the West and it is sometimes difficult to realise the effect on Far Eastern populations, where standards are not so high, of the many virulent diseases indigenous to those far-away countries. Typhoid, cholera, smallpox, and malaria are only some that are endemic to the peoples. Of these diseases, particularly in Burma, malaria was the greatest scourge and had a marked effect on plans and operations in 1942/43.

Over the years, through vaccinations and inoculations, the incidence of typhoid, cholera, and smallpox had been reduced. In India, so far as the soldiers were concerned, with good accommodation, mosquito nets, and repellents, together with medical attention and well-equipped hospitals near at hand, the upper hand had been gained over malaria and health generally was good. But when on active service in primitive conditions the situation was very different, and in the early stages of the Burma campaign the toll taken by malaria was infinitely greater than the number of casualties inflicted by any other source. So great was the number of cases that in the forward areas units were so reduced in strength as to make them unfit for service. In fact, there was a serious danger of some units disintegrating.

At first the only treatment for the disease was quinine and, with the enormous increase in the numbers of troops in eastern India, supplies were insufficient. The situation was also aggravated by the shortage of medical units, doctors, nurses, and equipment.

On the lines of communication from Dimapur to Imphal, and among the soldiers of 23rd Indian Division patrolling forward to the Chindwin, thousands went down with fever. There were instances of battalions being reduced to a fighting strength of one company; out of a patrol of 140 men from a British battalion, 70% contracted malaria. One brigadier, when ordered to send out a patrol for three weeks, remonstrated because there was no quinine, pointing out the futility of the operation as, within a week, the men would be carrying one another.

Among the technical and administrative units the situation was just as bad. In one recovery company, responsible for 60 miles of road, only one sergeant and two Indian mechanics remained on their feet, resulting in a long line of vehicles standing by the roadside awaiting repair while others, which had been involved in accidents, lay broken and weather-beaten down the hillsides because there was nobody to retrieve them; in the mule companies there were often barely sufficient men to look after the animals, let alone lead them when loaded (in one company of 280 men, only 63 were fit to work). Construction of urgently needed telephone lines ceased because most of the signallers were laid low, while of such reinforcements as struggled up the lines of communication, frequently more than 50% contracted malaria on the journey and went to hospital on arrival.

As soon as one hospital was filled and another was constructed to take the load, that too filled immediately, as did the next; the field ambulances were overflowing with malarial cases so that regimental aid posts had to treat them in situ, sometimes holding as many as 250. When evacuated to India, many were reinfected during the journey and did not return to their units, if they ever returned, under five months.

By November 1942, 23rd Indian Division, totalling some 17,000 men, was permanently 5,000 men under strength – a very serious shortage in view of the enormous area for which it was responsible. At one period the annual rate of malaria in the Eastern Army rose to 84% and the daily sick to no less than 12,000 per day. A state was, therefore, rapidly approaching which might be compared to that experienced in the West Indies in 1790 when the army had been decimated by the 'black vomit' or yellow fever.

Yet malaria was not the only disease that attacked the fighting soldier – there was also scrub-typhus, caused by a mite that infested certain areas of scrub and grass in which the men lay down to sleep. As a result of the bite, glands swelled in various parts of the body, some men developed a rash or went deaf, others had difficulty in breathing when the disease attacked the lungs. The only cure was careful nursing, good food, and rest. To move a patient was dangerous and in one case when the doctors insisted that if the patients were moved they would die, nursing sisters went out to the hill on which they lay and tended them on the spot.

To overcome the ravages of malaria took many months and, although some progress was made by the introduction of attabrin and the issue of gloves and masks to men on patrol, it was not until General Slim took command of the 14th Army towards the end of 1943 that the situation really improved. Malaria Forward Treatment Units – in other words, tented field-hospitals – were positioned immediately behind the fighting formations: to them went the men who contracted malaria and there they remained for about three weeks until fit to return to their units. Thus battalions, artillery regiments, and administrative units were not seriously weakened for months on end, the lines of communication were not choked with myriads of sick, and for those who hoped to get away from Burma as a result of a bout of fever, the idea was not so attractive.

At the same time, prevention being better than cure, General Slim insisted upon the strictest malarial discipline through the regimental officers and non-commissioned officers. The introduction of the yellow mepachrine, later paludrine, tablets had a lasting effect. The daily dose was taken night and morning under the supervision of an officer and when a patrol went out, each man carried sufficient tablets to last for the duration of the patrol; the wearing of shorts at any time was prohibited and shirt sleeves were rolled down at dusk; surprise inspections were held and should it be proved that less than 95% had taken mepachrine, the commanding officer was removed. At first a rumour spread that the tablets made men impotent, but the medical authorities quickly dispelled the alarm and shortly everybody assumed the jaundiced com-

Keystone

Indian Congress Party leaders Nehru and Gandhi. Their arrest, following their decision of July 1942 to resist the British government with 'non-violent' recalcitrance, set eastern India ablaze with mob violence and sabotage, which paralysed many important sectors of the Burma front

plexion brought about by the drug. By degrees, through the united efforts of the army commander downwards and the medical authorities, the incidence of malaria decreased, until in 1945 it had been reduced to one per 1,000 per day

### An operation to improve morale

By the end of August, because of the delays caused by the riots, the effects on the lines of communication of a particularly heavy monsoon, and the wastage due to sickness, it was plain that Operation Anakim would have to be postponed for a further year. In consequence, General Wavell turned his attention to Akyab Island, in Arakan, the capture of which would bring material advantages since not only would it weaken the threat of Japanese air attack on Calcutta, but it would also enable the Royal Air Force to strike at targets deep in enemy-held Burma: of utmost importance, too, it might well produce the successful operation for which he was looking to improve the morale of soldiers and civilians alike.

Until July, Lieutenant-General N. M. S. Irwin had commanded 4th Corps in Assam, comprising 23rd Indian Division and 17th Indian Division, recuperating after its arduous retreat from Burma, but at the end of that month he was appointed to command Eastern Army, responsible for the defence of India's eastern frontier, including Arakan: to meet any advance into southern Bengal by the Japanese by way of Arakan, a depleted 14th Indian Division had been located in the vicinity of Chittagong.

To Irwin, General Wavell issued a directive in September: to capture Akyab and reoccupy northern Arakan; to improve the position in the Chin Hills, south of Imphal; to establish forces in Kalewa and Sittaung. on the Chindwin, from which to raid Japanese communications in north Burma. Finally, he was to improve the administrative situation to allow for the swift advance into Upper or Lower Burma in the dry weather of 1942/43, should the opportunity arise.

For the seaborne assault on Akyab it was expected that 29th Infantry Brigade, which had carried out the successful landings in Madagascar during the previous May, would be available, together with the necessary shipping. As a diversion to this seaborne attack, it was planned that 14th Division, when brought up to strength, was to move south down the Mayu peninsula, to capture the only lateral road in Arakan, running from the small port of Maungdaw on the Naf estuary, to Buthidaung on the Kalapanzin river. The actual timing of the assault on Akyab could not be determined as it was not clear on what date 29th Brigade would arrive, but when it was known that this would not be before January, this information, together with the fact that the increase in aircraft had been slower than expected, necessitated a change of plan. Instead, General Wavell ordered Irwin first to capture the whole of the Mayu peninsula by a land advance of 14th Division and follow this up with an assault across the narrow strip of sea separating Akyab from the mainland. Thus plans were now in motion for the first offensive operation of the war against the Japanese.

### Orde Wingate arrives

To conform with his instructions for the Assam/Burma front, Irwin ordered 4th Corps in November to gain control of the Upper Kabaw valley, form a bridgehead at Sittaung and, at the same time, begin the construction of a road from Imphal to Tiddim, with the eventual object of reaching Kalewa through the Chin Hills.

Meanwhile, other plans of a highly un-

Sado-Opera Mundi

Japanese platoon on the Chindwin, the main 'front line' in north-west Burma after the 1942 campaigns. Despite British suspicions of connivance, the Japanese were not the source of the nationalist riots in India, and in fact failed to turn Britain's embarrassment to their own advantage

orthodox nature had been under close consideration in Delhi, for in March 1942 there arrived in India a Lieutenant-Colonel O. C. Wingate, who had gained much experience in conducting guerrilla operations both in Palestine and recently with the Patriots in Abyssinia.

A full description of him appears elsewhere, but suffice it to say that he was a controversial figure, unusual in appearance and manner, with supreme confidence in his own ideas and an ability to inspire others. His conviction was that forces supplied by air and controlled by wireless could not only operate behind the enemy lines in the heart of the Burmese jungle, disrupting communications and obtaining valuable strategic information, but could compel the Japanese to divert a number of troops out of all proportion to the raiding forces. In his opinion, success depended on two main factors—the force had to be strong enough to inflict a damaging blow yet sufficiently small and mobile to hide and evade the enemy's reactions.

Those who had the good fortune to serve under Field-Marshal Wavell in Aldershot in pre-war days and to take part in his highly imaginative training exercises—then to fight later at Sidi Barrani, the daring plan for which General O'Connor was responsible and which General Wavell approved—will appreciate that the idea of such operations as Wingate had in mind appealed to him. As a result, after consideration of the general manpower situation, he authorised the formation of one long-range penetration brigade, the 77th. This began its specialised training in July 1942 and marched into Burma in February 1943.

### Far-reaching effect on morale

The first operations in Arakan (see page 1294) opened in late September 1942 and were concluded in March 1943, at which time the British and Indian troops found themselves back in almost the same position from which they had started. The defeat was sufficiently bad from a tactical point of view, but its effects on morale were far-reaching. Other than in Assam, morale from Eastern Army Headquarters downwards reached a very low ebb. As a counteraction to the failure in Arakan it has been claimed by some that Wingate's first expedition had a heartening effect, and although this may well be so as far as the Allies generally were concerned, by virtue of its boldness, and the fact that an offensive operation had been undertaken, it is doubtful if it gave any significant uplift to the army. Although an outstandingly courageous venture, one-third of the force had been killed or were missing and no strategic value had accrued; on the credit side, the operation had proved that columns of reasonable size, supplied by air, could move about in the mountains and jungle. On the other hand, the Japanese were quick to seize upon this evidence, which unquestionably influenced them when it was proposed to capture Imphal a year later.

Without a high morale among the soldiers, the war in Burma could not be won and this applied not only to the troops in contact with the Japanese: it applied equally to those responsible for keeping the fighting formations supplied with all their needs—the men in the depots, reinforcement camps, hospitals, and workshops, and the lorry drivers on the lines of communication. What was needed was the restoration of that inner feeling or spirit which enables men to give their all, whether things are going badly or well; in other words, confidence in the cause, in their leaders, their comrades, themselves, and their weapons. This could only be instilled by a high standard of leadership at all levels, by practical and realistic training for the job in hand, and by a sound, carefully prepared administration to ensure, as far as possible, that the troops received good food and accommodation, the best weapons with ample ammunition, and the best medical attention. Up to this time, all these ingredients had been sadly lacking.

In the circumstances, it was a difficult task, since from the outset on every occasion on which British and Indian troops had met the Japanese, either they had suffered an overwhelming defeat – Hong Kong and Malaya, for example – or they had been forced to withdraw. The more recent defeat in Arakan had been only another link in the unbroken chain of defeats. The result was that a feeling had grown up among a large number, particularly back in India, that the Japanese were supermen, machines without human feelings – as was evident from their barbaric treatment of prisoners – and that their training, organisation, and weapons were vastly superior.

For these reasons alone, defeat and the invasion of India seemed inevitable. What they did not realise was that jungle warfare needed a technique of its own and the troops had not had time to train for it, nor had there been sufficient aircraft to contest Japan's complete air superiority. It was vital that the junior leaders and their men be acclimatised to the unaccustomed and claustrophobic conditions of the jungle and this could only be achieved by experience, particularly in patrolling. It was, therefore, doubly fortunate that, after the Arakan failure, several months passed before the next major action, so enabling the forward troops to become adepts in patrolling and giving formations destined for Assam and Arakan time to train for this specialised type of operations.

From the beginning and for many months afterwards, the administrative machine was severely handicapped because, the likelihood of a war on the eastern frontier of India having been considered so remote, little or nothing had been done before the war to make the railways and roads suitable for such an eventuality. Yet the troops had to be supplied with food, arms, and ammunition; the guns with shells; aircraft, tanks, and wheeled vehicles with petrol; the hospitals with medical stores; and, as important, casualties had to be evacuated. Vast quantities of materials had to be sent along the lines of communication to build the forward airfields and provide storage for material, since there were no local resources for these purposes.

At any time this called for a quick and sufficient means of transportation with a highly organised system to work it – and there was no through road from India to the fighting fronts. For the Assam or Central Fronts the only means of transportation were the railway and the Brahmaputra river, both slow and totally inadequate for the demands made upon them. From Calcutta to Pahbatipur, a distance of 250 miles, the railway was broad-gauge, although for half that stretch it was only single track; thereafter it was narrow-gauge, which entailed the complete unloading and reloading of the wagons for the journey to Pandu on the Brahmaputra, where the wagons were ferried across the river on barges and the train reassembled for the final 150 miles to Dimapur, the rail-head. To make matters worse, at times floods or landslides washed away miles of track and, on one occasion, an earthquake put 100 miles out of action. Following a hazardous lorry drive of 130 miles over the mountains and through the gorges between Dimapur and Imphal, the journey of a tin of bully beef or a gallon of petrol was by no means over – a distance of 80 miles of execrable track had to be covered before they reached the forward formations around Tamu and, later, 160 miles on to the division at Tiddim in the Chin Hills.

In Arakan, because in pre-war days passengers and goods mostly moved by sea or river, there were no roads running from north to south. Here the problem was not one of mountains, but the lack of road-building material and the numerous tidal creeks which had to be crossed by ferry. For road-metalling, millions of bricks had to be baked on site and then thousands of coolies employed to sprinkle the surface with water in dry weather, to prevent the road from disintegrating into dust.

Largely because of the appalling lines of communication, the ration situation was deplorable and diet in a hot eastern country, important at any time, was even more so in war if the soldiers were to be kept in proper condition to fight and endure the hardships of climate and environment. Of fresh meat, especially necessary for British troops, there was practically none. On the central front, as far as Imphal, the men received half an issue a week, while those forward of that place had none and existed on monotonous bully beef, reduced in hot weather to a warm glutinous fluid. In Arakan, where the troops were nearer to a source of supply, there was an issue of fresh meat twice a week, a luxury compared with that supplied to the central front.

The lot of the Indian troops was worse in this respect, since religion did not permit many of the races to eat the substitute tinned meat. Normally, if for some reason fresh meat was not available, additional issues of milk and *ghi* (clarified butter) had been made instead, but since reserve stocks were so low no extra issue was possible.

Vegetables, too, by the time they had completed the week's journey from Bengal or Assam, frequently arrived as a putrid, evil-smelling mess and had to be thrown away. Substitutes, such as tinned or dehydrated vegetables or fruit, were seldom to be found in depots, while stocks of rice and *atta* were lamentably low.

As can be seen, the situation could hardly have been worse and although vast improvements were made, even by the end of the war in Burma, the lines of communication were a never-ending anxiety.

### Mountbatten takes over

Between January and August 1943, three top-level conferences were held to determine the course of future Allied strategy – Casablanca (January), 'Trident' in Washington (May), and 'Quadrant' in Quebec (August) – and at each the policy to be adopted in South-East Asia came under review.

It was at the Trident Conference that important changes in the South-East Asia command structure were considered, but six months were to pass before they were put into effect.

In principle, it was proposed that a separate command be created to control all operations in the theatre and that the Commander-in-Chief, India, having been relieved of operational responsibility against the Japanese, should concentrate on the training and organisation of the Indian army and the preparation of India as a base for the further conduct of the war in South-East Asia.

Further progress in this field was made in the ensuing months when it was agreed that the new command be Anglo/American with a British supreme commander, an American deputy, and an integrated Anglo-American staff; the proposed new role of the separate Indian Command was also approved and General Auchinleck became Commander-in-Chief when Field-Marshal Wavell was appointed Viceroy.

To give effect to the formation of South-East Asia Command (SEAC), Admiral Lord Mountbatten was appointed Supreme Commander on August 25, the day after the termination of the Quebec Conference, and Lieutenant-General J. W. Stilwell of the United States Army was selected as his deputy. Almost three months later Admiral Mountbatten assumed command and SEAC came into being, with Admiral Sir James Somerville as Naval C-in-C, General Sir George Gifford as C-in-C of 11th Army Group, and Air Chief-Marshal Sir Richard Peirse as Air C-in-C.

So far as the land forces were concerned, the changes in operational command necessitated certain reorganisation of headquarters. On the northern front, General Stilwell continued to command the Northern Combat Area Command (NCAC), in process of constructing a road from Ledo through the Hukawng valley in the direction of Myitkyina, with the object of joining up with the old Burma Road to China. As already described, the Central and Arakan fronts had been the responsibility of Eastern Army HQ, but with 11th Army Group about to be established, Eastern Army was abolished, the old peace-time Eastern Command HQ resuscitated, and a new headquarters – 14th Army – was formed. The effect of these changes was that Eastern Command became responsible for internal security in Bihar, Orissa, and most of Bengal, thereby permitting 14th Army to concentrate on operations against the Japanese, with a responsibility for only a small part of Bengal. To the command of 14th Army, General Slim was appointed.

As a result of the part he had played in the retreat from Burma in 1942 and in the Arakan operations early in 1943, Slim, by now 52 years of age, was by far the most experienced commander to oppose the Japanese. He knew their characteristics and tactics; he had had ample opportunity to see why the British had failed in the past and the impact of these failures, or, shall it be said, of the Japanese successes, on morale. Even more important he had learned from the mistakes made and realised that the success of any campaign he might have to fight in this undeveloped tangle of mountains, rivers, and jungle must depend on four factors: training, supply, transport – and above all morale.

It was to these matters, many details of which have already been given, that he turned all his energy and attention immediately on assuming command. It is not therefore surprising that under the leadership of a commander of this calibre, the term 'The Forgotten Army', instead of being a phrase detrimental to morale, became one of pride among the British and Indian soldiers as victory followed victory until the final defeat of the Japanese in Burma.

*[For General Evans' biography, see Vol 2, p. 669.]*

# BATTLE FOR THE SOLOMONS

**South-Pacific Area, January 1943/January 1944**

*Brigadier-General Samuel B. Griffith, II*

January and February 1943 saw the US ordeal on Guadalcanal crowned with victory at last—and the sequel was to be a relentless Allied drive along the Solomon Islands chain to seal off Rabaul from the south-east. This campaign exploited a new kind of strategy: the concentration on special island targets in order to establish an overlapping system of controlled air space, leaving other enemy-held islands 'to wither on the vine'. The keystone of the Solomon Islands complex was the central New Georgia group, where the Allies faced desperate resistance and endured two months of bloody fighting—but by the time of the first anniversary of the triumph on Guadalcanal, US planes were flying constant sorties from Bougainville Island against Rabaul

## THE BUILD-UP

By mid-February 1943, US forces had finally completed their conquest of Guadalcanal. Their victory ended the first phase of Operation 'Elkton': the costly Allied campaign designed progressively to eject the Japanese from the southern, central, and northern Solomons—and ultimately to neutralise their bastion at Rabaul in New Britain.

From Rabaul's five airfields, and the spacious Simpson Harbour, Japanese 'Celestial Eagles' strike aircraft and cruiser/destroyer squadrons still posed a dangerous threat to Allied positions in New Guinea, and to the foothold seized in the lower Solomons. It was now Allied strategy to move the air bases forward some 400 miles, to central Bougainville. From this position they could mount unremitting air attacks on Rabaul—and effectively close the Solomon, Coral, and Bismarck Seas to the Imperial Japanese Navy.

Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, C-in-C Japanese Combined Fleet, was aware of these Allied intentions. Indeed, they became increasingly obvious as the situation developed in February and March 1943. Guadalcanal was being built into a huge base complex for the Allies. American army divisions and fresh Marines were moving in, new airfields were being prepared, and new supply facilities built. Each day saw additions to American ground, air, and naval strength.

In February 1943, the Allies took the first step up the Solomons' ladder. Operation 'Cleanslate', the seizure of the Russell Islands which lie only some 50 miles north-west of Cape Esperance, was not exactly a leap. But Vice-Admiral William F. Halsey, US C-in-C South Pacific (ComSoPac), saw it as an essential move to secure his investment on Guadalcanal. And, on February 21, US army and Marine assault battalions landed on Banika and Pavuvu, meeting no opposition.

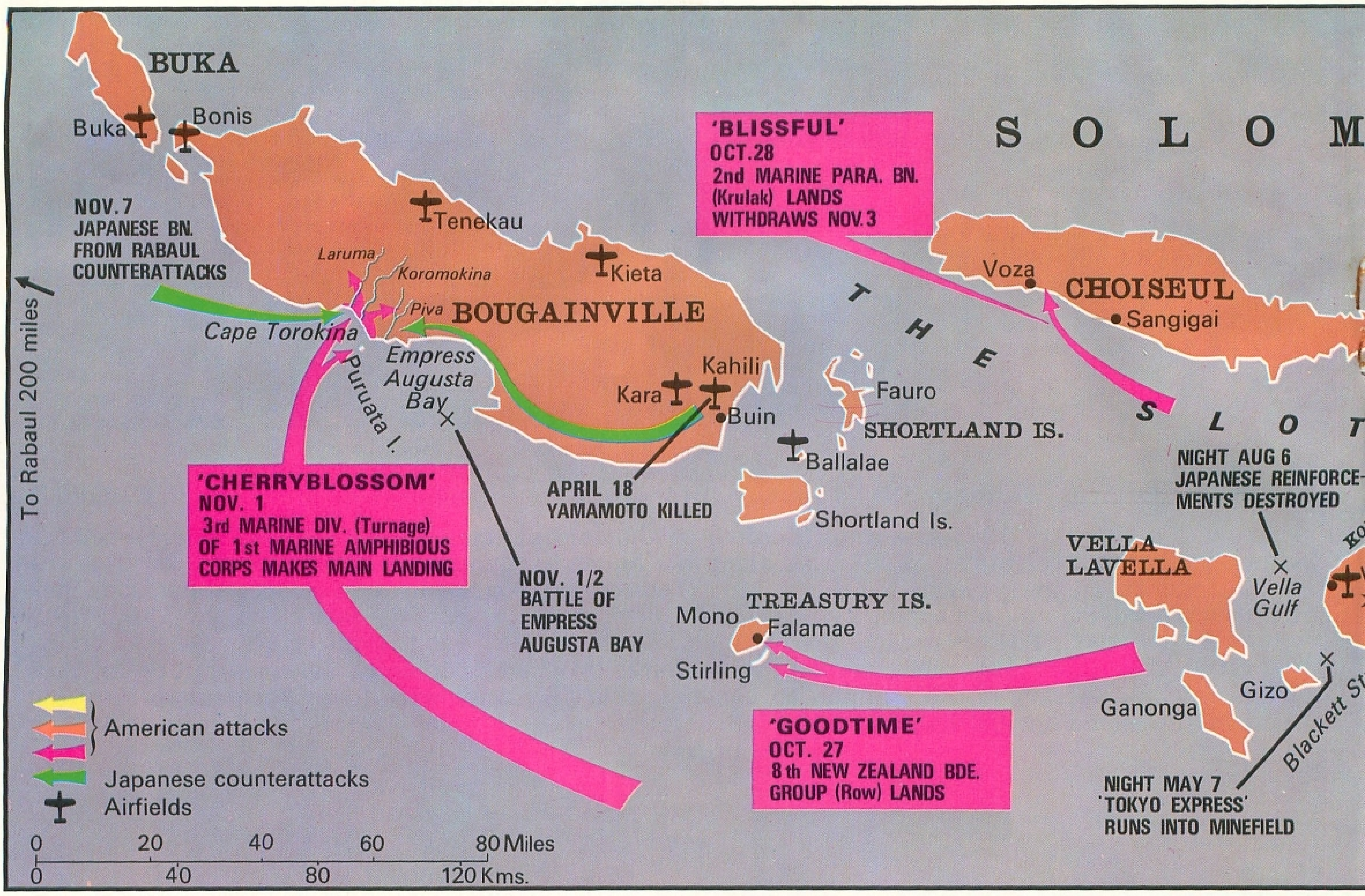
Yamamoto's reaction was swift. Apparently he had guessed MacArthur's intention to eject the weak Japanese forces from Lae and Salamaua and to establish a strong Allied air force on the Huon Peninsula in New Guinea, and decided to forestall the move. He therefore directed General Hitoshi Imamura, commanding the Japanese VIII Area Army based on Rabaul, and Vice-Admiral Janichi Kusaka, C-in-C South-East Area Fleet, to reinforce the New Guinea positions without delay. This decision brought on the Battle of the Bismarck Sea.

On March 1, an imposing Japanese troop convoy, carrying the LI Division, cleared Simpson Harbour and steamed along the north coast of New Britain. It was sighted, and its composition accurately reported, by a B-25 reconnaissance plane of MacArthur's 5th Air Force. On the following day the convoy was sighted again, and a squadron of B-17 Flying Fortresses went after it. Their bombs sank a large transport, which happened to be the command ship of the LI Division. This did not deter the Japanese, who sailed on, under cover of a lowering weather front, towards the Huon Gulf. But they sailed into a trap: prompt Allied air strikes sank nine of the troop transports and four destroyers.

Yamamoto again reacted vigorously, and on the afternoon of April 3 he flew from Truk to Rabaul to take command of *I Go* (Operation 'I')—a series of massive aerial counter-strokes against Allied shipping and air bases on Guadalcanal and New Guinea. To put together an attack force of almost 200 fighters and some 170 medium bombers, dive-bombers, and torpedo-bombers, Yamamoto stripped three Truk-based carriers of their 'Sea Eagles' and aircraft, and ordered them to Rabaul. For the first attack, launched against Guadalcanal on April 7, Yamamoto sent in 67 dive-bombers covered by 110 'Zeke' (improved Zero) fighters.

An air battle was joined over Savo Island in mid-afternoon. Japanese bombs sank a US fleet oiler, the destroyer *Aaron Ward,* and a New Zealand corvette. Allied fighters shot down 21 Japanese for the loss of seven, all of which were US Marine fighters. On this day, Captain James E. Swett, USMC, shot down seven Japanese planes.

Four days later the Japanese struck in force at shipping in Oro Bay, south-east of Buna, New Guinea, and their dive-bombers sank three ships. On April 12 over 200 aircraft attacked Port Moresby airfield, and two days later hit shipping at Milne Bay. From all these raids, elated Japanese pilots returned with glowing—and grossly exaggerated—reports of damage inflicted. According to the 'Eagles', they had sunk a cruiser, two destroyers, 25 transports and cargo ships, and had shot 134 Allied planes out of the air. Actual Allied losses were one destroyer, one corvette, one oiler, two cargo ships, and


BUKA
Buka
Bonis
NOV. 7
JAPANESE BN.
FROM RABAUL
COUNTERATTACKS
To Rabaul 200 miles
Tenekau
Laruma
Koromokina
Kieta
Piva
BOUGAINVILLE
Cape Torokina
Puruata I.
Empress Augusta Bay
Kahili
Kara
Buin
'CHERRYBLOSSOM'
NOV. 1
3rd MARINE DIV. (Turnage)
OF 1st MARINE AMPHIBIOUS
CORPS MAKES MAIN LANDING
APRIL 18
YAMAMOTO KILLED
NOV. 1/2
BATTLE OF
EMPRESS
AUGUSTA BAY
'BLISSFUL'
OCT.28
2nd MARINE PARA. BN.
(Krulak) LANDS
WITHDRAWS NOV.3
SOLOM
Voza
CHOISEUL
Sangigai
THE SLOT
Fauro
SHORTLAND IS.
Ballalae
Shortland Is.
NIGHT AUG 6
JAPANESE REINFORCE-
MENTS DESTROYED
VELLA
LAVELLA
Vella
Gulf
TREASURY IS.
Mono
Falamae
Stirling
Gizo
Ganonga
Blackett St
'GOODTIME'
OCT. 27
8th NEW ZEALAND BDE.
GROUP (Row) LANDS
NIGHT MAY 7
'TOKYO EXPRESS'
RUNS INTO MINEFIELD
American attacks
Japanese counterattacks
Airfields
0 20 40 60 80 Miles
0 40 80 120 Kms.

**TO THE DOORSTEP OF RABAUL**

Halsey's drive through the Solomons was a preview of how the whole Pacific war was going to be fought: a series of outflanking operations to secure key air bases, followed in each case by two to three months' build-up for the next hop. The Solomons campaign started in February 1943 with the taking of the Russell Islands, and during the rest of the year the Allied amphibious forces leap-frogged their way along the southern fringe of the 'Slot', forcing the Japanese garrisons in the northern islands to withdraw or perish. And when the Bougainville airfields had been cleared and repaired, the Allies could mount a non-stop bombing offensive against the key target of Rabaul

fewer than 20 aircraft. The inflated reports caused Yamamoto to believe that *I Go* had been a smashing success, and on April 16 he called off the operation. Two days later Yamamoto and his staff left Rabaul to inspect newly-completed air bases on Buka Island, and at Buin, on the south tip of Bougainville.

This was to be Yamamoto's last inspection trip, for Admiral Chester Nimitz' Pacific Ocean Areas communication intelligence unit had managed to break the latest Japanese naval code, and the Admiral's itinerary was known. His transport, escorted by six Zekes, was shot to pieces by Guadalcanal-based P-38s as it approached the Buin runway. Most members of Yamamoto's staff perished with their leader.

The Japanese could not for long conceal the fact that Yamamoto was dead. Nor was there available to replace Yamamoto any senior officer of the Imperial Japanese Army or Navy whose skill, determination, and ability to inspire his subordinates were equal to the Admiral's. Admiral Minichi Koga, the eventual replacement, was not a man who could wear Yamamoto's shoes comfortably.

### A delay of great value

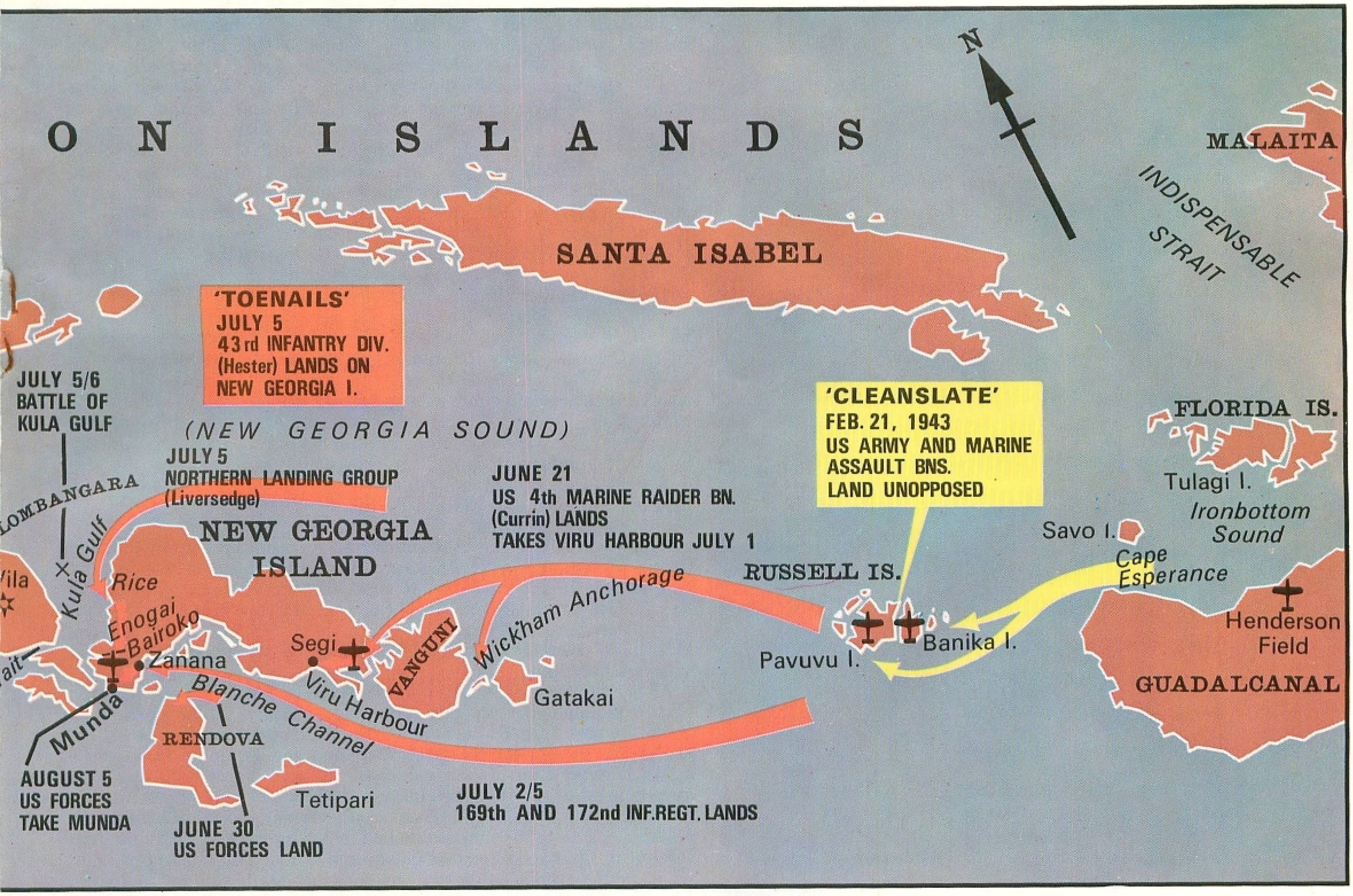
The modified Elkton plan, agreed upon by representatives of MacArthur, Nimitz, and Halsey during conferences in Washington in mid-March, had called for a delay of about 60 days in Halsey's operation to seize Munda airfield on New Georgia. Accordingly, ComSoPac tentatively set D-Day for the assault on Munda as July 1. In the event, this delay proved of great value, for it enabled the Allies to carry out detailed reconnaissance of Japanese positions in the New Georgia group.

These jungle-clad islands, lying about midway between Guadalcanal and Bougainville, were little known. The terrain had never been mapped, and sparse hydrographic data were out-dated and totally unreliable. Halsey deemed it essential to get first-hand information, and fortunately there was an agency available, and capable of doing just this.

This unique organisation, the Solomon Islands Coast-Watchers, had been established before the war by Commander Harry A. Feldt, RAN. The Australian government had foreseen the possibility that these remote and little-known islands might one day fall to the Japanese, and had commissioned Feldt to establish a network of observers, equipped with compact portable high-powered radio transmitters, to provide information of Japanese activities. Feldt went to work, and by the spring of 1941 had a functioning organisation in place.

Essentially, this consisted of Solomon Islands planters who had agreed to stay behind and 'go bush' should the Japanese arrive. These few brave men were augmented by a dozen young members of the British and Australian Colonial services, plus several score native 'police boys' whose loyalty, diligence, and bush knowledge were unquestioned. Halsey later wrote that, beginning with the Elkton planning, he 'never made a forward move without their help'. Indeed, this help in New Georgia (as it had been in Guadalcanal) was indispensable to the success of Allied arms in the South Pacific.

After making contact with the Coast-Watchers, patrols would return to Camp Crocodile on Guadalcanal with vital terrain and hydrographic information—including hundreds of photographs—that was otherwise unobtainable. They made reef tidal measurements (in this area erratic and unpredictable tides were usual), took soundings, checked and plotted entrances to lagoons, selected possible landing areas for assault troops and heavy equipment, marked trails, plotted Japanese installations (one report was so detailed that it included the exact locations of officers' and enlisted men's latrines), and carefully observed Japanese movements. They had good information on


ON ISLANDS
N
MALAITA
INDISPENSABLE STRAIT
SANTA ISABEL
'TOENAILS'
JULY 5
43rd INFANTRY DIV.
(Hester) LANDS ON
NEW GEORGIA I.
JULY 5/6
BATTLE OF
KULA GULF
(NEW GEORGIA SOUND)
'CLEANSLATE'
FEB. 21, 1943
US ARMY AND MARINE
ASSAULT BNS.
LAND UNOPPOSED
FLORIDA IS.
Tulagi I.
Ironbottom Sound
Savo I.
Cape Esperance
JULY 5
NORTHERN LANDING GROUP
(Liversedge)
LOMBANGARA
JUNE 21
US 4th MARINE RAIDER BN.
(Currin) LANDS
TAKES VIRU HARBOUR JULY 1
NEW GEORGIA ISLAND
RUSSELL IS.
Henderson Field
ila
Kula Gulf
Rice
Enogai
Bairoko
Zanana
Segi
VANGUNI
Wickham Anchorage
Pavuvu I.
Banika I.
GUADALCANAL
ait
Munda
Blanche Channel
Viru Harbour
Gatakai
RENDOVA
Tetipari
AUGUST 5
US FORCES
TAKE MUNDA
JUNE 30
US FORCES LAND
JULY 2/5
169th AND 172nd INF.REGT. LANDS

Japanese reinforcements in men and heavy weapons, on Japanese habits, and indeed, on Japanese activities in general.

In early March, the Japanese had dispatched Rear-Admiral Minoru Ota to rush defences in the New Georgia group to completion. Ota concentrated his Special Naval Landing Forces (SNLF) at Munda and at Vila on Kolombangara. During March and April, Japanese naval elements were reinforced by troops drawn from both the XXXVIII and LI Divisions and on the last day of May, Imperial Headquarters activated a joint Army-Navy defence force, the South-East Detachment. General Noboru Sasaki, whose XXXVIII Division provided principal elements for the defence of Munda-Kolombangara, was to take command. As of late June, Sasaki had under command some 11,000 troops, of whom about half had been provided by the Imperial Navy's Kure VI SNLF and the Yokosuka VII SNLF. Major elements provided—with some reluctance—by the Imperial Army were two infantry regiments, a mountain artillery regiment, two air defence battalions, a field AA battalion, and a field searchlight battalion.

The army's contingent was rounded out with the XVII and 131st Pioneers, several AA machine cannon companies, and some extra artillery batteries. In addition to Admiral Ota's two SNLFs, the navy had contributed a number of seacoast defence batteries of 140-mm, 120-mm, and 80-mm guns. As June drew to its end, General Sasaki and Admiral Ota had reason to feel that they could seriously delay, if not indeed stop, the Allied drive up the Solomons towards Rabaul. They had been instructed 'to engage the enemy in decisive combat'. It was their intention to do so.

## NEW GEORGIA:

## THE MAIN ATTACKS

While the Japanese were rushing the defences of the New Georgia group to completion, the Allies were planning an operation with the unpromising code-name of 'Toenails'—the seizure in two phases of the Munda and Kolombangara airfields—at Camp Crocodile, the headquarters of the Amphibious Force commander, Vice-Admiral Richmond K. Turner.

Simultaneously a series of heavy air attacks was launched against Munda and Kolombangara from airfields on Guadalcanal and in the Russell Islands. During March, April, and May, the Japanese were subjected to at least one heavy strike, often two or three, a day. Detailed photography, particularly of Munda Point, revealed progress on the airfield there. Night raiders dropped flares and bombs, and US navy cruiser and destroyer task forces rained shells on both Japanese airfields on at least four occasions.

But these attacks did not deter Japanese attempts to keep the defence forces supplied. Almost every night, three or four destroyers—the 'Tokyo Express'—slipped south-east between Vella Lavella and Ganonga Islands en route to the Vila airfield via Blackett Strait. In early May, Turner decided to derail the 'Express'. On the night of May 6, he sent Rear-Admiral Walden L. Ainsworth, USN, up the Slot with three cruisers, five destroyers, and three mine-layers. By 0200 hours a field of magnetic mines had been laid between Gizo and Kolombangara. Ainsworth withdrew as silently as he had slipped in.

The following night, this effort hit the jackpot. Four Japanese 'Express' destroyers ran into the minefield. One sank immediately and two others were holed. At 1000 hours the next day, when planes from Guadalcanal reached the scene, they found two ships dead in the water, and the intact destroyer picking up survivors. The two damaged were promptly sunk; the third, seriously damaged, managed to return to Buin. These activities were enjoyed by Coast-Watchers, who provided Turner's headquarters with a blow-by-blow description of the proceedings.

A week later, Ainsworth tried a reprise of his previous successful operation when he led three cruisers and five destroyers into Kula Gulf. At the same time, a cruiser and three destroyers steamed up Blanche Channel to bombard Munda airfield. The task forces pumped almost 10,000 high-explosive 5- and 6-inch shells into Munda-Vila while Ainsworth mined Kula Gulf. The mining produced no immediate dividends. Nor did the intensive shelling do more than superficial damage: the next morning 26 Zeke fighters, landing at Munda to fuel, attacked Ainsworth's task force as it was returning to Guadalcanal.

US Navy

ADMIRAL ISOROKU YAMAMOTO, C-in-C Combined Fleet, was the outstanding Japanese naval strategist of the century. Realising that the development of long-range strike aircraft was spelling the end of the dreadnought battleship age, he devoted himself to the study of the aircraft-carrier and its acceptance in the Imperial Japanese Navy. As a result, Japan had one of the most formidable carrier fleets of any world power by 1941, drilled and trained into a superbly-balanced weapon. His complete understanding of the meaning of sea power meant that he knew that Japan could never hope to match the inexhaustible resources of America and her Allies in a prolonged war: This was why, when war became inevitable, he pressed for a knock-out blow against the US Pacific Fleet before it could become any stronger – which resulted in the Pearl Harbor strike in December 1941.

Yamamoto's famous warning – 'I shall run wild for the first six months of year of war, but have utterly no confidence in the second or third years' – was ignored by Japan's other war leaders . . . with consequences fatal to Japan. Yamamoto knew that Japan's only real chance of victory was to score the 'Runaway Victory' within her grasp, extend her island perimeter wide enough to prevent any attacks on the Japanese homeland, and hold on to this perimeter by waging defensive war. But this policy was betrayed by the Japanese High Command, which tried to carry Japanese conquest into the southern and eastern Pacific.

Shocked by Doolittle's air raid on Tokyo mounted from a US carrier – which had achieved complete surprise – Yamamoto planned the campaign to occupy Midway and force a decisive fleet action. And it was in the fighting for these further advances that Japan lost, in the battles of the Coral Sea and Midway, not only half her aircraft-carriers but virtually the whole of her élite and irreplaceable naval aircrews, upon which her naval superiority and early victories had relied.

After the first Japanese land defeats in New Guinea and the eastern Solomons, Yamamoto prepared a massive naval air counter-strike – Operation 'I' – designed to smash and contain the Allied advances during the spring of 1943. But the Japanese losses were again heavier than Japan could afford – and Yamamoto was only deceiving himself when he claimed that Operation I was achieving its object. However, he did not live long enough to realise his failure: on April 18, 1943, he was ambushed by US fighters while flying from Rabaul to Bougainville, shot down, and killed. Yamamoto proved to be a truly irreplaceable war leader: his death did not help the steadily-growing catalogue of Japanese defeats, and it relieved the Allied commanders in the Pacific of their most formidable opponent.

### Japanese air-strikes smashed

Coast-Watchers Evans on Kolombangara, Horton on Rendova, and Kennedy at Segi sent the usual accurate warnings, and 100 Allied fighters scrambled. Seventeen Zekes were shot down; five Allied planes lost. The Japanese, sensing that the invasion of the New Georgia group was imminent, redoubled their air activities. Between June 7 and 16, they lost 152 aircraft in three major air battles over the Russells and Savo Island. These strikes inflicted negligible damage on Allied shipping, nor did the Solomons Air Force suffer commensurate loss: only 21 Allied planes were shot down.

By this time, final arrangements for Toenails had been perfected. The principal assaulting unit was to be the US army's 43rd Infantry Division under Major-General John H. Hester. This was reinforced by the US Marine Corps 9th Defence Battalion; a field artillery battalion; a Naval Construction battalion; a company of Marine Raiders; the 1st Commando, Fiji Guerrillas, and assorted engineer, transport, medical, and other service troops.

Vice-Admiral Turner was in overall command of the operation, and would land and support Hester's Landing Force, directed to seize Munda. A smaller Eastern Force, under command of Rear-Admiral George H. Fort, USN, was to seize Viru Harbour, Segi Plantation, and Wickham anchorage.

The plan called for the attack on Munda to proceed in two phases. In the first, landings would be made on the north shore of Rendova Island, where heavy artillery was to be emplaced for a pin-point bombardment of Munda. This was to be followed – on 'D + 4' – by the landing of two combat teams (the 169th and 172nd) on beaches at Zanana, some 8,000 yards east of the Munda airfield objective. The seizure of Rendova was itself to be preceded by landings at Viru Harbour, a Japanese barge base believed to be held by one depleted company. Segi Plantation, the home base of Coast-Watcher Kennedy, had been surveyed, and an area for a fighter strip had already been selected. The troops for these preliminary operations were to be drawn from Lieutenant-Colonel Michael S. Currin's 4th Marine Raider Battalion.

As it happened, the timetable for Currin's landings was suddenly altered – and by none other than Major-General Sasaki. For some months, he had put up with considerable annoyance from Coast-Watcher Kennedy's activities at Segi. Allied patrols had been infiltrating through Segi to be brought out again by native canoe to the waiting submarine, destroyer, or Catalina. And on June 17 another company of Japanese appeared at Viru with orders to 'pacify the area' – more specifically, to close down Kennedy's operations from Segi Plantation.

The sudden increase in Japanese activity alerted Kennedy to his imminent danger, and on July 18 he sent Admiral Turner a request for help. Turner did not want to lose Segi, and he responded immediately. On June 21, Currin's Raiders – less two companies – landed by rubber boat at Segi Plantation; and on the following morning two US army companies and an airfield survey party arrived.

Currin proposed to attack Viru from the rear. This plan called for an 8-mile paddle in rubber boats from Segi to Regi, followed by a three-day march through the jungle to positions behind Viru. For once, things went pretty well according to plan, and on July 1, Currin's troops hit the Japanese at Viru. Japanese security was lax, and surprise was almost complete. Currin's casualties were few.

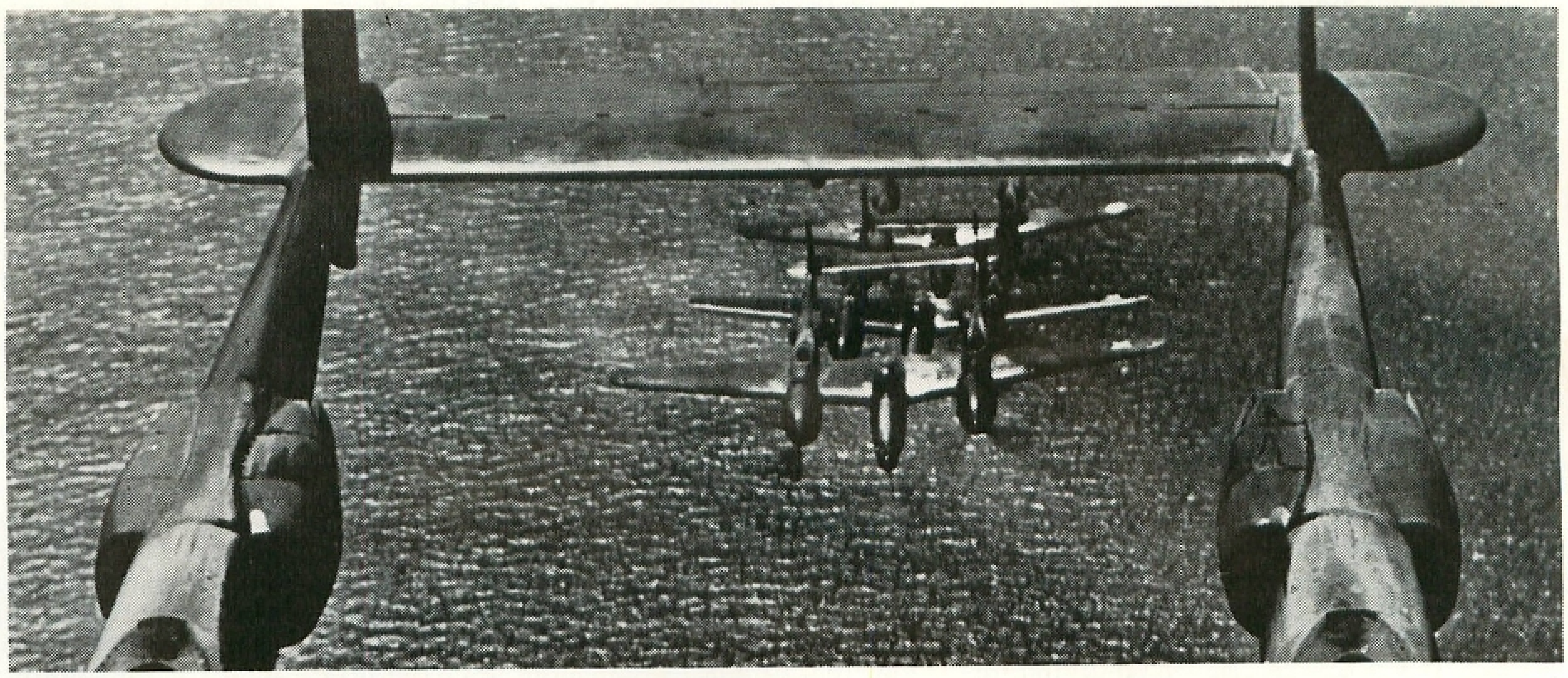
### The Japanese take to the hills

In the meantime the attack on Rendova had begun inauspiciously on the preceding day. The specially trained 'Barracuda' scouting groups of the 172nd Infantry, who were to have landed at first light to seize a beachhead from the transport destroyers *Dent* and *Waters,* were put ashore miles away from the selected landing points. By the time they found their way back, major elements of the Rendova assault force had landed against light and disorganised opposition. The Japanese defenders, who numbered about 250, were completely surprised, and after firing a few shots, took to the hills. (They were later hunted down by Fiji commandos.)

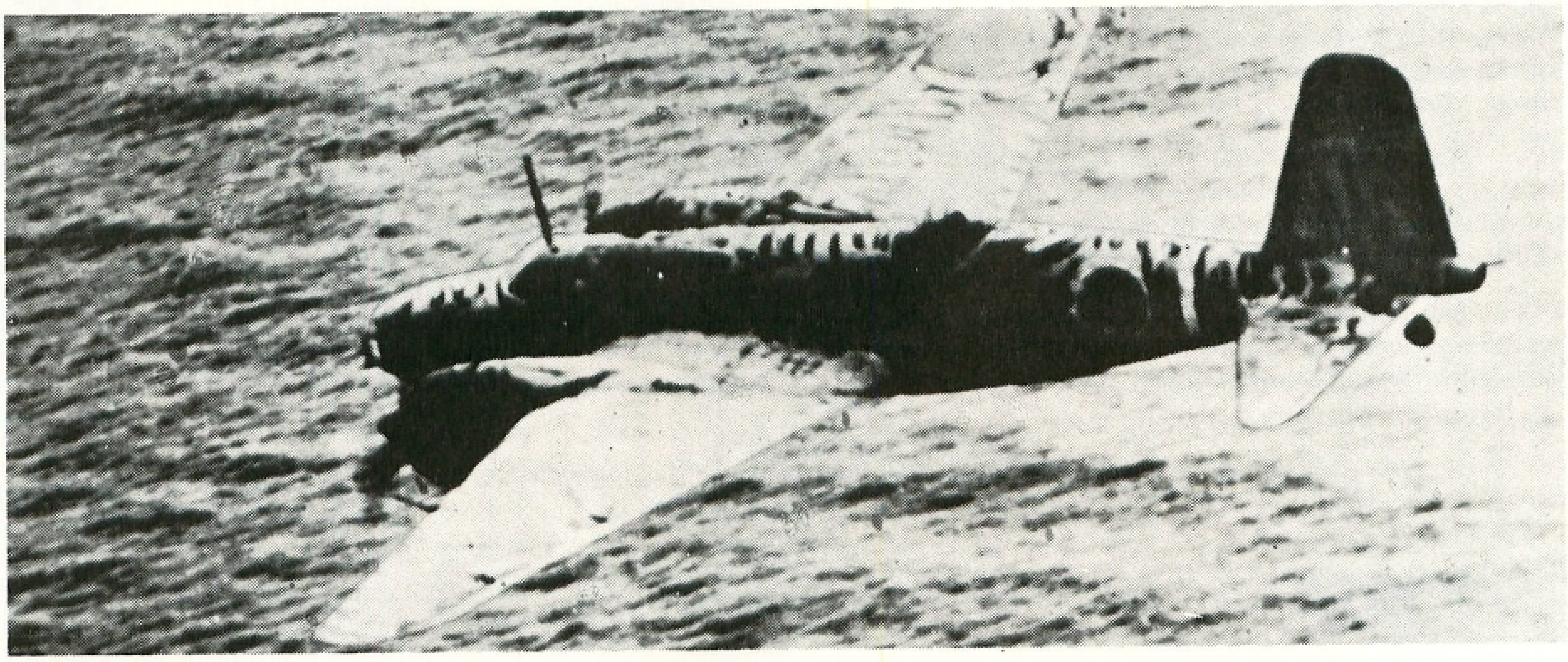
From the Munda side, the Japanese watched unloading proceed at Rendova. They were unable to do much of anything about it. They had not anticipated a landing there. Their coastal defence guns were not sited

## THE YAMAMOTO AMBUSH

▷ *Top:* US Lightnings in formation. When the US Pacific High Command intercepted a Japanese signal which indicated the route of Yamamoto's inspection tour in the western Solomons, a long-range fighter ambush was immediately ordered. Sets of extra fuel tanks were rushed to Guadalcanal from Port Moresby—and, on April 18, Major Mitchell of US 199 Squadron set out from Tassafaronga Field with 18 picked Lightning pilots. The Admiral's flight turned up on schedule and Mitchell's pilots intercepted it after a two-hour flight out from Guadalcanal. Yamamoto was travelling in a Sally transport *(right),* and while the other Lightnings took on the six Zero escorts, Lieutenant Lanphier closed in on Yamamoto's plane and chased it out of formation, shooting it down at so low an altitude that none of its passengers or crew escaped the crash



Imperial War Museum



Imperial War Museum

to bear down on Rendova. Their mountain artillery could not reach the targets. A XVII Army Operations report described this frustrating situation: 'Because of insufficient preparations and installations, our naval guns could not engage the enemy. Because of the range, the mountain guns were not able to fire against the enemy. Therefore, our unit was in the predicament that the enemy landed in broad daylight while our unit watched helplessly.'

Inland from the beaches, the inviting green floor of a Lever Brothers coconut plantation soon turned into a calf-deep sea of muck as amphibian tractors, jeeps, heavy dump trucks, dozers, and 6 x 6 artillery and AAA prime movers attempted to get off the vulnerable beach and move supplies to dump areas, and guns and radar equipment to positions neatly—and usually incorrectly—plotted on maps. On a narrow beach, a logistic nightmare was in the making.

As they shortly made apparent, the Japanese viewed Allied activities—whose purpose was painfully evident—with considerable alarm. At Rabaul, Admiral Kusaka had for two days been attempting to put together enough aircraft for a series of major strikes against Rendova, and on July 2 he sent down 25 Betty bombers, covered by 25 Zekes. The Japanese came in very low behind a weather front, swung east of Rendova mountain, and caught the troops totally unprepared. (In view of the weather, US fighter cover had been withdrawn about 20 minutes before the raid came in.) This raid killed and wounded almost 200 soldiers and sailors of the beach organisation, but inflicted little other damage. The Japanese suffered no losses.

Emboldened by the success of July 2, Kusaka attempted two days later to repeat it. This turned out to be a monumental mistake. Of a force of 100 planes which tried to break through, only 16 made it. Of these, 12 were shot down over Rendova by AA fire. This was the last major air attack against Allied positions in the Central Solomons.

The Japanese command in Rabaul was now faced with a serious dilemma. Halsey's forces were obviously in the Central Solomons to stay, and MacArthur was keeping the pot boiling in New Guinea. Both the Imperial Army and Navy air arms had lost hundreds of planes in April, May, and June. In addition, the navy had now (early July) six or seven destroyers and at least nine transports fewer than it mustered three months previously.

Japanese attempts to reinforce the New Guinea garrisons had failed as disastrously as had their attempts to deny the Allies a foothold in the Central Solomons. As of this time, Japanese commanders in those areas were to be very much alone. Rabaul made it clear that they would have to depend on their own resources, and on July 2, Imamura named General Sasaki to sole command of all Imperial Army and Navy units in the Central Solomons. This was the first 'unified' command created by the Japanese in the Second World War. Sasaki was not to be given much time to co-ordinate his defences, for already assault units of the US 169th and 172nd Infantry Regiments had landed over the Zanana beaches and were pushing west towards the Bariki river.

Although Japanese plans called for 'destruction of the enemy at the water's edge', assault troops found Zanana undefended. By the night of July 5, both regimental combat teams were ashore, with direct support artillery, emplaced on nearby islets, ready to assist the jungle advance.

On this date, the Northern Landing Group under command of Colonel Harry ('The Horse') Liversedge, USMC, had landed from destroyer transports before dawn at Rice Anchorage, about 15 miles north of Munda, and was already pressing south towards Enogai Inlet and Bairoko Harbour.

Aside from difficulties imposed by the jungle, the enervating heat and lack of water, first omens for the assault on Munda appeared altogether favourable. But at midnight on July 6, the roof almost fell in. As the 169th Infantry paused for the night along the eastern branch of the Bariki river, it was hit and its defensive perimeter infiltrated. There ensued a near calamity.

The 169th Infantry had never before been in combat, and although it had been in rigorous jungle training on Guadalcanal for some months before coming to New Georgia, the officers and men were psychologically completely unprepared to cope with a sudden, vicious, close-range night attack in the jungle. The Japanese hit the leading battalion of the 169th, which almost literally fell apart. After six hours of indiscriminate shooting and much grenade throwing, punctuated by considerable shouting and invective, came a welcome dawn. The day was devoted to caring for the wounded – many of whom had been shot by their own friends – and general reorganisation.

On the night of July 8, both regiments were on the east bank of the Bariki, which Hester had chosen as line of departure for the attack to the west. The 172nd Infantry was on the left (south); the 169th on the right (north) echeloned to the right rear.

Hester now planned to jump off on July 9, and at dawn that morning the zone of action west of the Bariki was plastered with over 2,000 rounds of 5-inch high-explosive, delivered by a task group of four destroyers. As these fires lifted, five artillery battalions opened. When this ceased, 88 scout and torpedo-bombers hit presumed defensive areas west of the Bariki. The heavy bombardments heartened the assault troops and no doubt upset the Japanese, but the amount of damage inflicted on Japanese positions was later discovered to have been negligible. In fact, the basic problem was that no one yet had the slightest indication either as to precisely where these positions were, or what their nature was.

The few trails from the Bariki river back to Zanana were by this time practically impassable. Swamps and matted underbrush challenged engineers who slowly pushed routes toward the front. Their work was constantly impeded by Japanese snipers and small combat patrols. At this time, then, the most pressing decision facing Hester was how to provide assured supply and evacuation. This problem became the more acute because, after crossing the Bariki, the 169th on the right ran into a series of solidly constructed and carefully concealed bunkers. The defenders, armed with heavy and light machine-guns and small mortars, stopped the 169th cold.

### Japanese fall back on Munda

Hester accordingly directed the 172nd to swing south and attack Laiana Beach, and the 169th to extend its line towards the south. On the 13th of July the soldiers, after heavy fighting, stepped from the jungle on to coral sand. The Japanese defenders, taken from the rear, pulled out and fell back towards Munda. A few hours later the first of a procession of tank lighters and landing craft arrived at Laiana.

In the meantime, Hester had relieved the colonel commanding the 169th Infantry, who, with most of his staff, was shipped back to Guadalcanal. He was replaced by a younger, more vigorous officer, Colonel Temple Holland, who brought with him a hand-picked staff. Holland spent two days visiting the front lines and pulling the badly demoralised regiment together. In the next four days, in a series of sustained battalion attacks, the regiment pushed forward 1,000 yards through heavy jungle, and overran a number of bunkered positions. From the tops of the hills they had taken, the exhausted troops could clearly see Munda airfield. But that objective was still almost 5,000 yards away, and the convoluted, difficult terrain was such that commanders and soldiers sensed that the passage would be difficult, dangerous, and time-consuming.

Indeed, General Sasaki had taken measures to ensure that it would be. Every night he ordered reinforcements from Vila. These troops, mostly machine- and anti-tank gunners and pack artillerymen, barged nightly across Kula Gulf from Vila with their equipment. After landing in Bairoko Harbour, they proceeded overland to Munda. The US navy attempted, without significant success, to stop this reinforcement.

In Rabaul, General Hitoshi Imamura, aware of Sasaki's difficulties, began barging troops from Bougainville down to Kolombangara. Imamura, determined to exact a high price for Munda, exhorted Sasaki's New Georgia defenders to die gloriously for the Emperor.

On July 15, with the assistance of six Marine tanks landed over Laiana, the 172nd Infantry launched an attack to the west. This made slow progress against Japanese bunkers, which were constructed of coconut logs and perfectly camouflaged. Prospects for any further significant advance seemed dim. Both the 169th Infantry on the right and the 172nd on the left were stalled, as much by the terrain, heat, and sheer ex-

**The drive on Rabaul begins . . .**

US Marine Corps

haustion as by the defenders. Supply and evacuation—tortuous and precarious processes—drained combat units of half their effectives.

This was the situation on the American side when, on July 16, Sasaki decided to counterattack. He ordered the XIII Regiment, under Colonel Satoshi Tomanari, to move from positions north of Munda, march east through the jungle, and swing down into the rear areas of the 43rd Division. This movement was detected on July 17, and shortly after nightfall elements of the Tomanari force struck US supply areas, command posts, and artillery positions. Fighting raged in the rear areas throughout the night, but at dawn Colonel Tomanari called off the attack: his regiment—or what was left of it—was badly scattered, and he ordered a general withdrawal to Munda. This attack marked the last effort by Sasaki to take the initiative.

It also resulted in a major US effort to get the operation going again. Between the morning of July 18 and the evening of July 22, four regimental combat teams landed—the 148th, 145th, 161st, and 103rd. The bulk of the 169th was withdrawn to Rendova for a needed rest and reorganisation. Almost two full divisions were now ashore, holding a line of about 4,000 yards north from Laiana. At this point, 14th Corps was activated, under the command of Major-General Oscar W. Griswold.

For the next six days, assault troops battled slowly towards Munda, and on August 1 advance elements of the 43rd Division broke out of the jungle on to the southern strip of the airfield. Almost immediately, Japanese defences east of the field collapsed, and Sasaki withdrew for a last-ditch stand to high ground north of the airfield. Four days of sporadic fighting followed, but by the evening of August 5 the airfield and surrounding areas were in Allied hands.

Sasaki apparently failed to convey the news of his defeat to Rabaul, where frantic, last-minute plans were being made to reinforce him. On August 6, Japanese XVII Army HQ on Bougainville ordered forward two infantry battalions, one each from the VI and XXXVIII Divisions. These troops embarked after sunset. As the destroyers rushed south through Vella Gulf *en route* to Kolombangara, they were ambushed by an Allied task force of six destroyers. Three Japanese ships went down, taking with them over 1,500 seamen and soldiers. It was a flaming curtain to the campaign in the Central Solomons.

Within ten days, Allied fighters were operating off Munda Field. And in Camp Crocodile US Navy and Marine planners focused their attention on the next target: Bougainville.

## NEW GEORGIA:

## THE NORTHERN ATTACKS

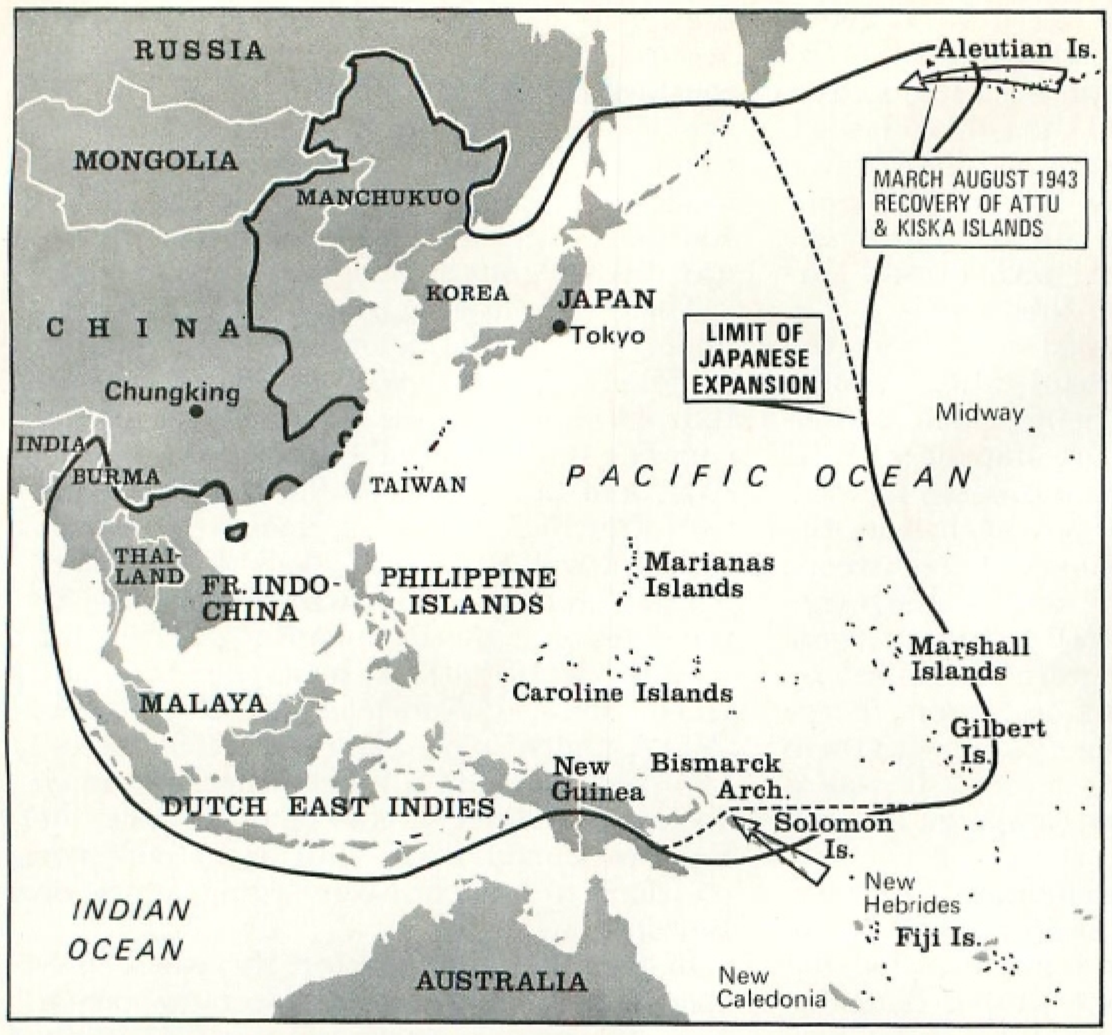
When the American forces attacked New Georgia in June 1943, the defending Japanese forces under General Sasaki were split about equally, with half at Munda on the south coast and the other half at Vila, on the adjacent island of Kolombangara. Additionally, the Japanese had a large barge base on the north coast of New Georgia at Bairoko, with a battery of four 140-mm naval rifled guns at Enogai Inlet to the east.

These two outlying positions were of great importance to the defence of the Japanese airfield at Munda. With a secure base at Bairoko, the Japanese could bring men and supplies nightly down Blackett Strait from Vila, and across the southern end of Kula Gulf. The naval guns at Enogai were sited to command Kula Gulf. And the VI Kure Naval Landing Group was responsible for the defence of the Bairoko/Enogai area.

Halsey's US attack plan therefore provided for the Northern Landing Group (NLG), under Colonel Harry B. ('The Horse') Liversedge, to land at Rice Anchorage, march overland to Enogai and take it, block the Bairoko/Munda track, and from these two positions to launch a converging attack on Bairoko.

In every sense of the word, this was a risky operation. It called for destroyers to operate close inshore, in darkness and in the uncharted waters of Kula Gulf, which was sporadically patrolled by Japanese naval task forces. The terrain between Rice Anchorage and Enogai was jungle country, completely unmapped, and reported to be criss-crossed with sluggish streams and patches of low-lying swamp. First reports

US Marine Corps



By August 1943 the north-east and south-east outposts of the Japanese Empire had been driven in by the Allies

US Marine Corps

'Inland from the beaches, the inviting green floor of a plantation would soon turn into a calf-deep sea of muck'

had indicated that this approach was simply not practicable for Liversedge's force of three battalions.

But there were also encouraging arguments for a landing at Rice. Donald G. Kennedy, the Coast-Watcher at Segi Plantation on the south-east tip of New Georgia, could provide native scouts who knew the area well; and two US reconnaissance patrols, led by Captain Clay A. Boyd, had visited the Rice landing-area, made contact with Kennedy's agents, and reported that approach-routes could in fact be cut through the tangled country between Rice and Enogai.

Native teams cleared jungle growth to create a landing area some 550 yards upstream from the mouth of Rice Inlet; and during the night of July 4/5, a US cruiser/destroyer force headed in with Liversedge's NLG aboard. A Japanese submarine, lurking in Kula Gulf, fired a spread of torpedoes which sank the US destroyer *Strong,* but by 0330 hours on the 5th the NLG had landed in torrential rain and could begin to sort itself out—no easy task this.

Boyd was on hand to greet the arriving Marines and soldiers, and with him was Flight-Lieutenant J. A. Corrigan, RAAF (one of the redoubtable Kennedy's Coast-Watcher colleagues), who commanded a welcome force of 100 native carriers. Shortly after dawn the troops ate a breakfast of cold rations, stacked all extra supplies and equipment in the jungle, and set off on three parallel trails for the eastern tip of Enogai Inlet.

This was a two-and-a-half-day struggle that those who made are unlikely ever to forget. Rain fell ceaselessly, and the ground was soon turned into an ankle-deep morass. During the first day alone, the columns covered about 5 miles, halting for the night at the Giza Giza river. This night was uneventful for the troops, but was marked by a ferocious naval battle out in Kula Gulf, in which the US cruiser *Helena* and two Japanese destroyers were sunk.

By July 7, Liversedge's advance group was swinging round the eastern tip of Enogai Inlet and heading west into the Dragon's Peninsula, which separated Enogai from Bairoko. There were fierce clashes with the Japanese, but by July 10 Liversedge's forces were well established in the Japanese rear, between Enogai and Bairoko, and his main body was moving in to attack Enogai.

The first reaction from the defenders of Enogai came late in the afternoon, when two Japanese light machine-guns opened fire on C Company in the centre. Sporadic firing broke out along the front as the Japanese rushed small groups to reinforce their lightly-held outpost positions. The firing died away as darkness closed down, but the Raiders slept little that night.

Shortly after dawn the attack was resumed—and now the Japanese, whose positions were sited to defend against landings from Kula Gulf rather than from inland, began to fall apart. By mid-afternoon the Raiders were in full possession of Enogai its battery of 140-mm guns, numerous ·50-inch AA and other machine-guns, with considerable amounts of food, small arms, and ammunition. They had suffered 48 men killed, four missing presumed dead, and 77 wounded in the operation; the Japanese about 350. The Enogai garrison had been wiped out.

On July 11, the general situation on New Georgia gave the Allied command reasonable cause for satisfaction:

- Currin's Raiders had taken Viru in the south;
- Rendova Island had been occupied;
- A US fighter strip was under way at Segi Point, over which Kennedy presided;
- 'Dutch' Schultz's battalion, from Liversedge's force, was in a blocking position astride the Munda/Bairoko trail;
- Liversedge's main body, having taken Enogai, was preparing to assault Bairoko.

The only lag was in front of Munda itself, where Hester's 43rd Division was encountering strong resistance from the Japanese—abetted by the jungle and the foul weather.

At the trail block, Schultz was having his own problems. One of these was lack of food and water; the other was the Japanese. Schultz had established his block on the morning of July 8, and by that afternoon had been attacked twice by Japanese patrols. On July 10, the Japanese sent in two probing attacks. These were apparently designed to distract Schultz from a weak point the probers had discovered on his right. Here the Japanese struck in considerable force, and heavy but inconclusive fighting raged for several hours. That night, small groups of Japanese made banzai charges which the Raiders repulsed. By July 12, Liversedge had moved a company to support Schultz's forces, and for the first time in four days the soldiers ate a decent meal—thanks to the efforts of 'Corry's Boys', as Corrigan's carriers had been affectionately dubbed.

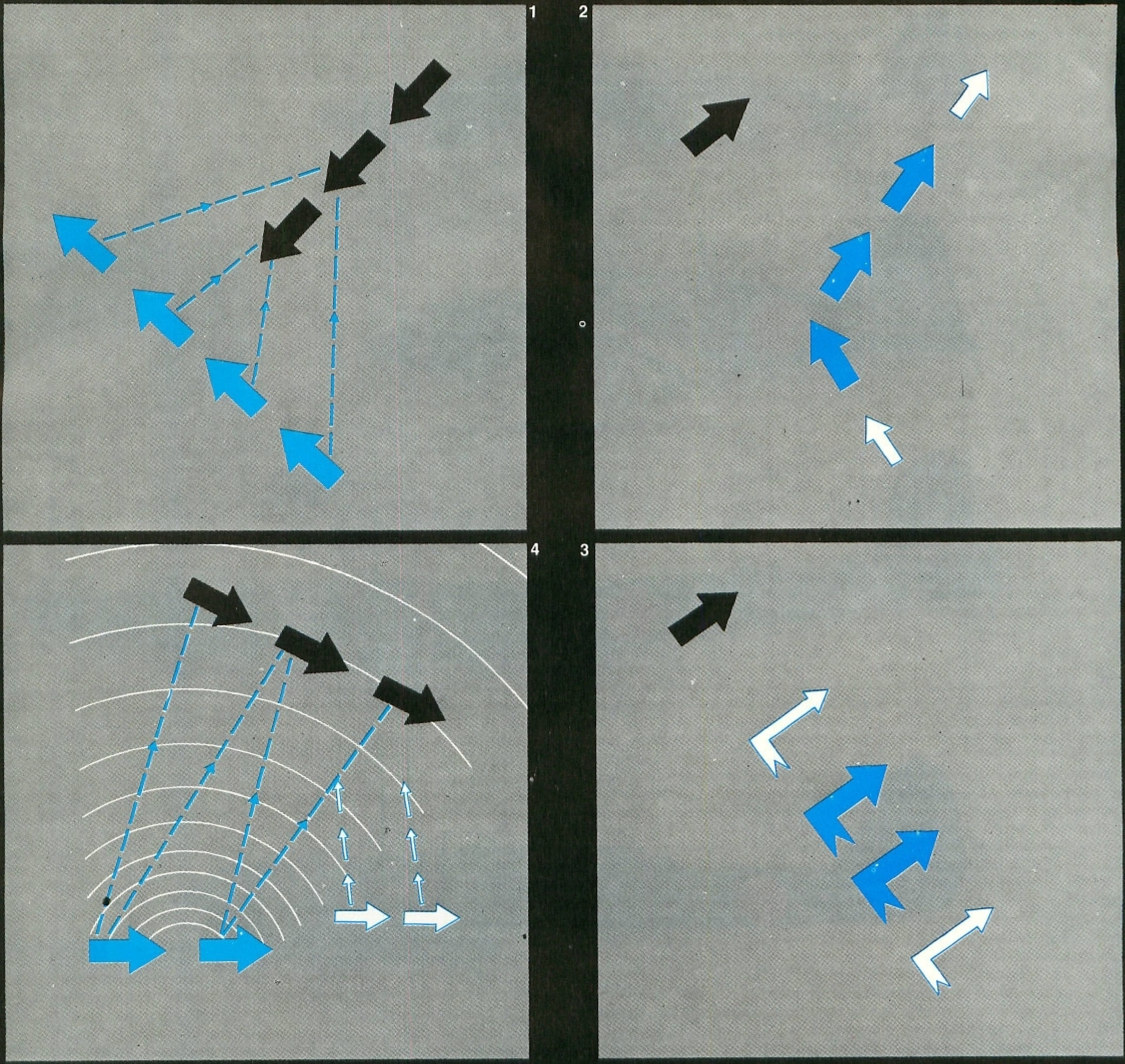
Liversedge was now faced with the problem of tackling Bairoko, but before this could even be seriously considered he had to concentrate his scattered forces. He therefore ordered the supply base at Rice to be closed down and the naval landing-craft there to move to Enogai. He directed Freer to concentrate his 3rd Battalion, 145th Infantry at Triri, and after a personal reconnaissance ordered Schultz to withdraw from his position astride the Munda/Bairoko trail, for supplying Schultz's force was causing serious problems where it was.

At Enogai, the Raiders were clean, well fed, and reasonably healthy. Patrols towards Bairoko clashed fitfully with Japanese outposts, and a few casualties were suffered. The main problem at Enogai during this period came at night, as Japanese raiding floatplanes banished sleep. Every night the Marines were forced to scramble into dugouts as the sentries picked up the distinctive drone of 'Washing-Machine Charlie's' engine; then the bombs would come down. Happily, they did small damage.

The approaches to Bairoko had been well scouted, but Liversedge had no good estimate of the size, quality, or armament of the Japanese force there. This was to prove crucial, for at Bairoko the Japanese had not the two companies indicated by the reports but a full-strength battalion,

**1564** ▷

# KEY TACTICS IN THE SOLOMONS SEA BATTLES



Peter Sarson

All the battles for the Solomons—from Savo Island in August 1942 to Empress Augusta Bay in November 1943—were fought with tactics dating back to the age of fighting sail. The admiral who manoeuvred his ships to get the most out of their fire-power won the battle. These diagrams illustrate the main tactics which dominated the Solomons naval battles

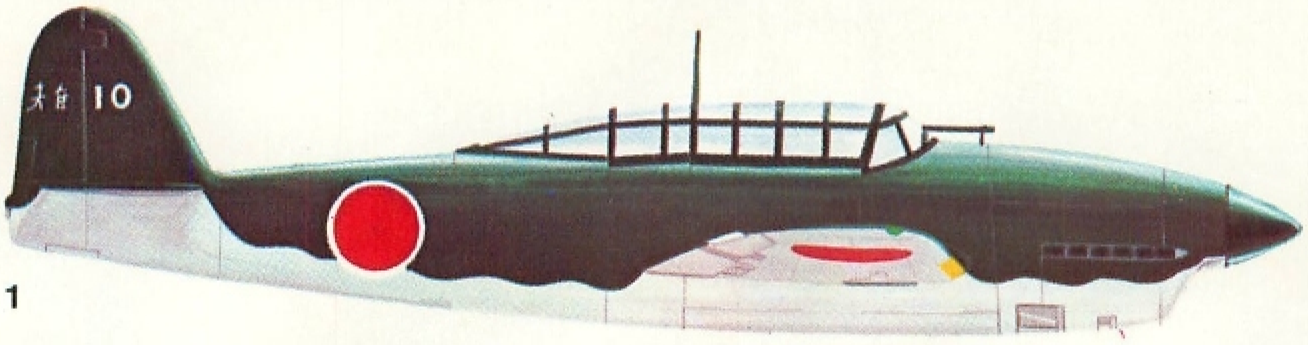
1. Crossing the 'T' enabled the attacker (blue) to focus his fire-power against the leading ships of the enemy's line, which at the same time masked the fire of the ships behind them. This was the situation for which every admiral hoped

2. Cruiser/destroyer line turning in sequence. The long single line favoured by American commanders in the early battles off Guadalcanal was unwieldy in a crisis, and by no means easy to control. Cruisers are shown in blue

3. Cruiser/destroyer line turning together. In a similar situation to (2), a simultaneous turn by the American ships would theoretically leave the destroyers (white) nearer the enemy masking the fire of the ships further away

4. Learning from experience: US cruiser/destroyer attack, exploiting radar superiority to the full. The destroyers make a torpedo attack (thin white arrows) on the unsuspecting enemy; the cruisers wait for the enemy to react before opening up with their radar-controlled guns (blue arrows)

In the early actions off Guadalcanal, the Japanese showed themselves greatly superior to their opponents in night fighting, and they took full advantage of the weak American tactics. But the trained Japanese crews were gradually whittled away in battle after battle, while the Americans learned—the hard way—to get the best out of their radar and fire-power superiority



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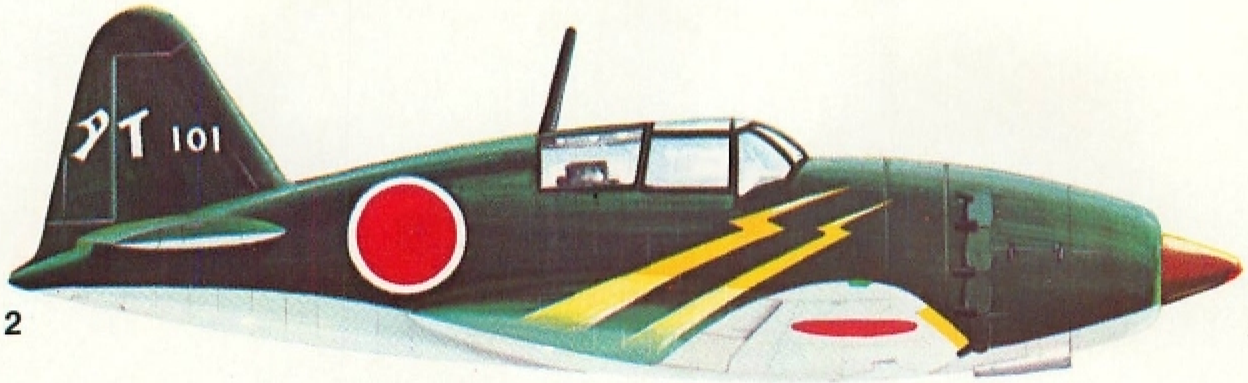

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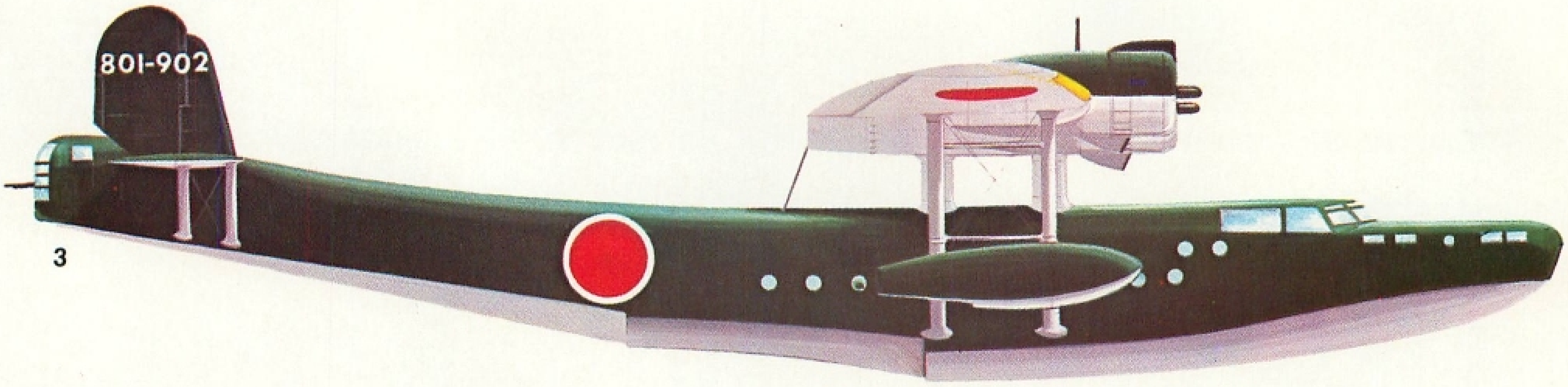

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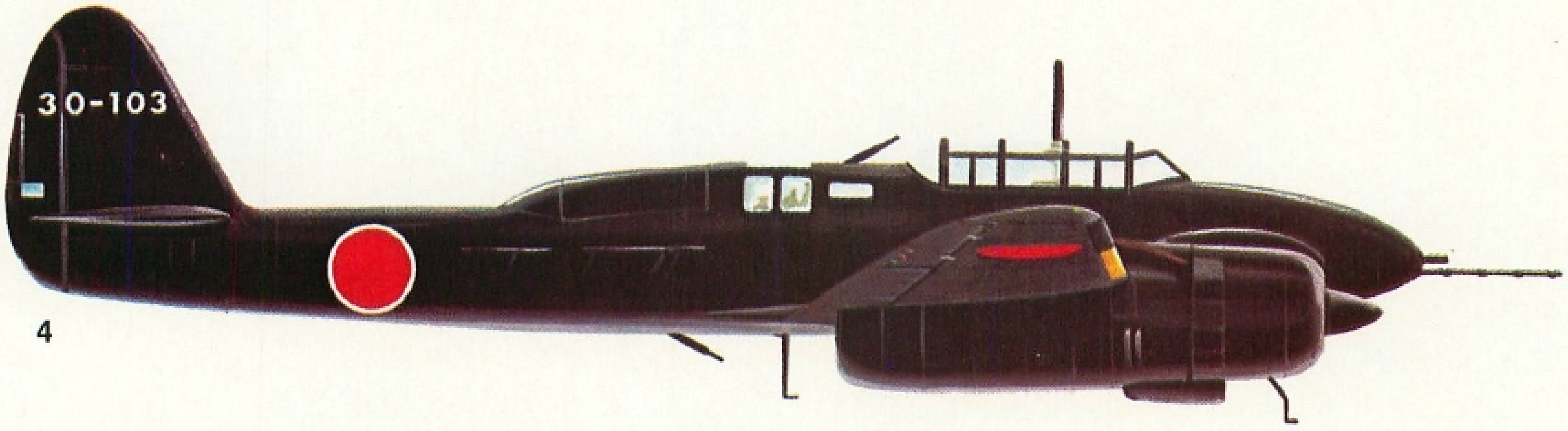

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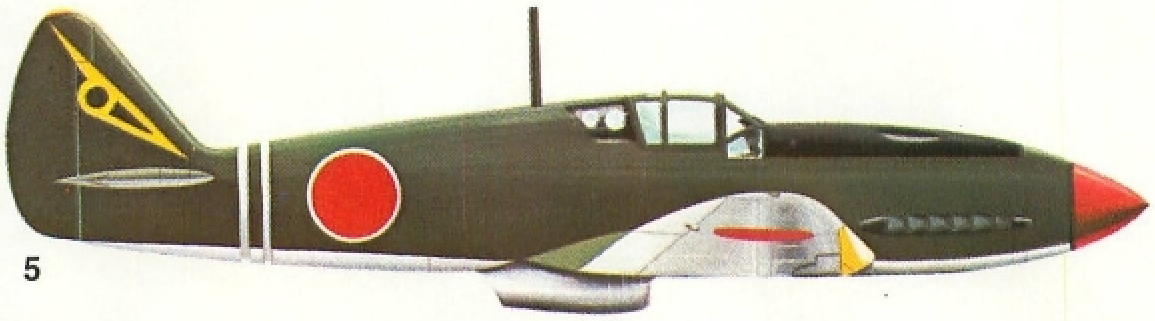
# Japan's later warplanes

Japan s air forces went to war largely relying on the navy's Zero fighter, Kate torpedo-bomber, and Nell and Betty long-range bombers, and on the army's Oscar fighter and Sally bomber. Production of these machines was kept up to speed the 'Runaway Victory', and the newer designs were shelved. But after 18 months of the Pacific War the back of Japan's carrier fleet had been broken at Midway and her outermost conquests had already fallen to Allied 'island-hopping' offensives. Now the Japanese needed aircraft capable of operating more from shore bases than from aircraft-carriers, and the new aircraft were rushed ahead. The Zero was supplemented by the Jack, the Kate by the Jill and the Judy. For the army, the new single-engined Tony and the twin-engined Nick began to replace the ageing Oscar. A new long-range bomber—the Helen—was intended to replace the Sally, Nell, and Betty, but never did. Yet none of these aircraft, old or new, could halt the swelling flood of Lightnings, Thunderbolts, and Fortresses

**1. JUDY: Yokosuka D4Y-2 *Susei***
A navy carrier bomber, the Judy first saw service as a reconnaissance plane at Midway, was later used extensively, and finally—like most Japanese types—saw service as a Kamikaze. *Max speed:* 335 mph. *Range:* 1,320 miles. *Crew:* two. *Armament:* three 7·7-mm machine-guns; 1,100 lb of bombs

**2. JACK: Mitsubishi J2M-3 *Raiden***
Designed as a single-seat shore-based interceptor fighter at the same time as the Zero, the Jack had so many teething troubles that it only entered service in small numbers. *Max speed:* 371 mph. *Range:* 650 miles. *Armament:* two 20-mm cannon, and two 7·1-mm machine-guns



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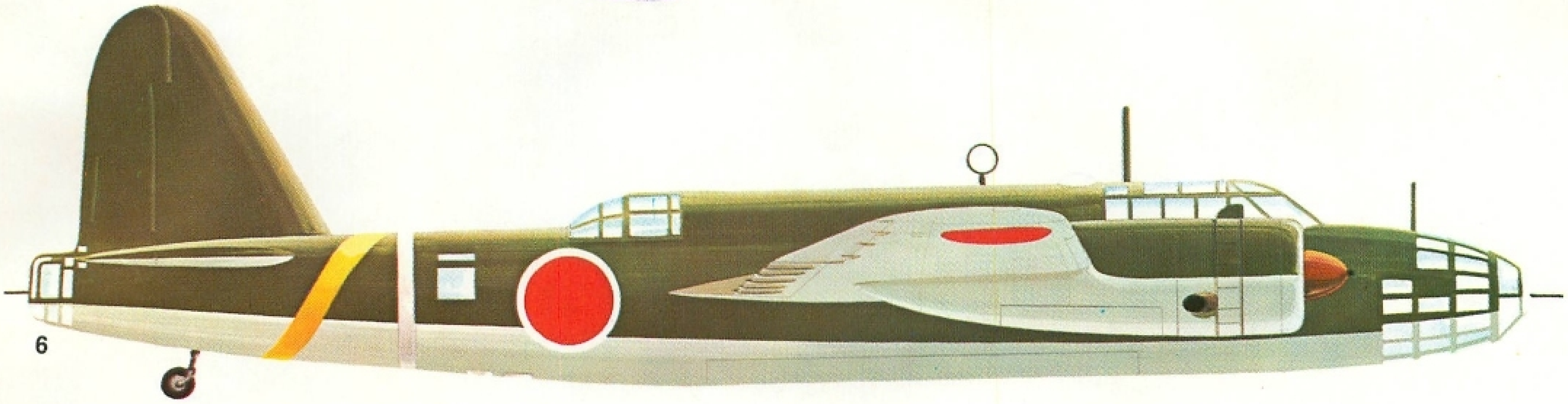

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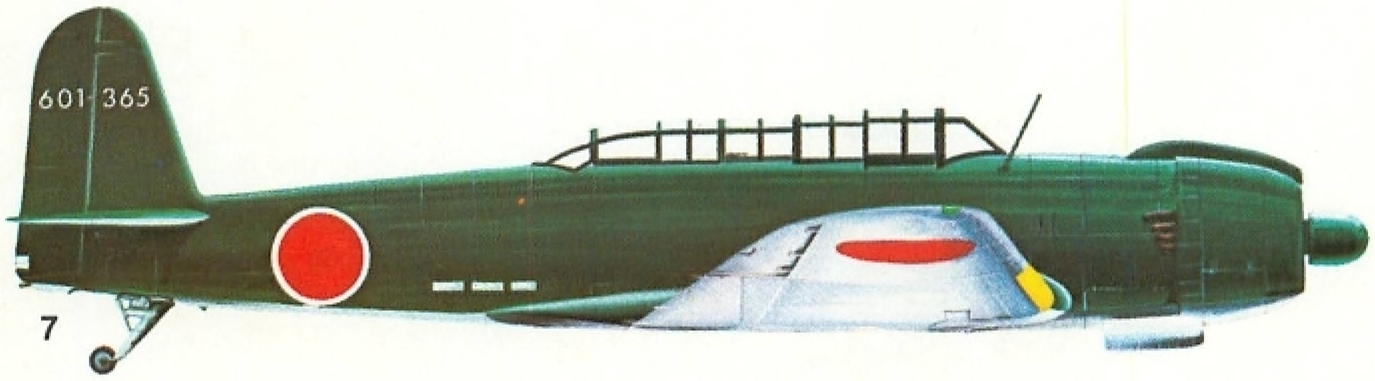

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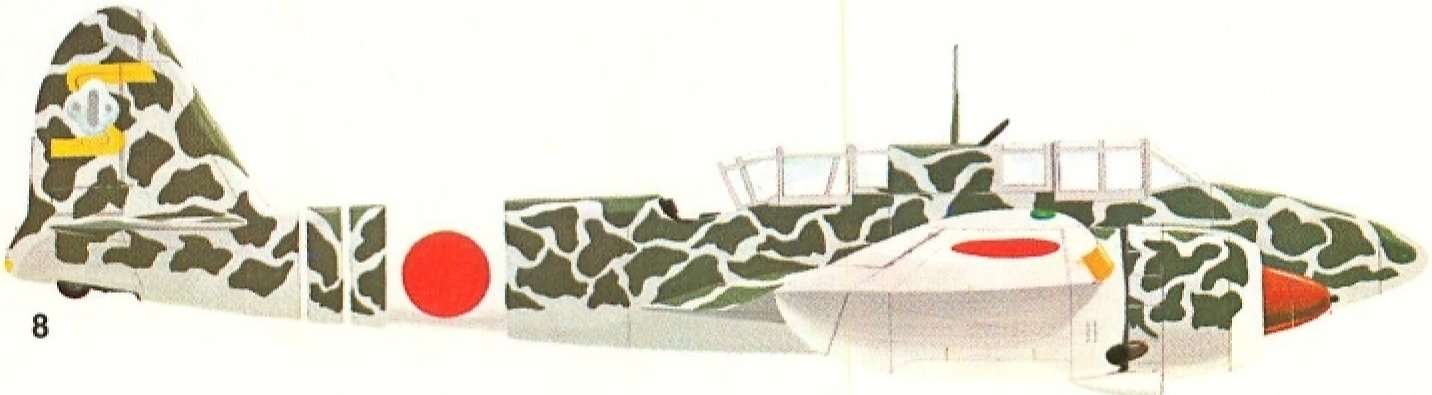

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John Batchelor

**3. MAVIS: Kawanishi H6K4-L Flying-boat**
This was one of the more elderly Japanese long-range navy patrol bombers; it was an unarmed type, and the lessons learned from it resulted in the 'Emily', which was given five cannon and four MGs. Mavis was then relegated to transport duties. *Max speed:* 237 mph. *Range:* 4,000 miles. *Crew:* nine (plus 18 passengers)

**4. IRVING: Nakajima JINI-S *Gekko***
Designed first as a fighter, then used by the navy in reconnaissance, then converted to a night fighter. It had a unique armament of two pairs of 20-mm cannon above and below the fuselage at an angle of 30°. *Max speed:* 315 mph. *Range:* 1,360 miles. *Crew:* two. *Armament:* four 20-mm cannon

**5. TONY: Kawasaki Ki-61 *Hien***
When Allied pilots first met Tony in action in 1943, it was thought to be a version of the German Me-109. Well armed and well protected, Tony was a formidable opponent; but its engine gave considerable trouble in service. *Max speed:* 348 mph. *Range:* 1,185 miles. *Armament:* two 20-mm cannon, and two 12·7-mm machine-guns

**6. HELEN: Nakajima Ki-49 *Donryu***
Helen was an army heavy bomber, designed for use in the event of Japan going to war with Russia, but was first used in action in a raid on Darwin in 1943. It was never produced in great numbers. *Max speed:* 306 mph. *Range:* 1,490 miles. *Crew:* eight. *Armament:* one 20-mm cannon, five 7·7-mm machine-guns

**7. JILL: Nakajima B6N-2 *Tenzan***
The Jill was the direct replacement for the Kate torpedo-bomber, and its first major action was the Battle of the Philippine Sea in June 1944. *Max speed:* 299 mph. *Range:* 1,600 miles. *Armament:* one 13-mm, one 7·9-mm machine-gun; one 1,764-lb torpedo OR six 220-lb bombs

**8. NICK: Kawasaki Ki-45 *Toryu***
The Nick was the first twin-engined fighter to enter service with the Japanese army air force; the Allies first met it in action over New Guinea in 1943, and it was also used in home defence duties. *Max speed:* 340 mph. *Range:* 932 miles. *Crew:* two. *Armament:* varied, but a typical combination was: one 37-mm, two 20-mm cannon, and one 7·7-mm machine-gun

US Marine Corps

After a Japanese air raid, American soldiers frantically roll oil and petrol drums away from a blazing fuel dump

four 90-mm mortars, and a battery of pack artillery.

Liversedge, reinforced by Currin's (understrength) 4th Raider Battalion on the 18th, planned to attack Bairoko on July 20. The attack was to be preceded by a heavy air strike at 0930 hours – but the Raiders stood on their jumping-off line in vain, waiting for the strike which never came. At the same time, Schultz's battalion – supposed to be in a jumping-off position east of Bairoko – was still a mile away from its designated start line. And to cap it all, Liversedge's radio communications broke down at the same time.

After a 45-minute wait for the non-existent air strike, the Marines attacked without it and the battle was joined. Secure in their concealed bunkers and camouflaged spider-type foxholes, the Japanese pinned down the attackers for half an hour. But by that time three key Japanese positions had been knocked out, and the strain was beginning to tell. The Japanese pulled out of their ridge line bunkers and fell back to a strong, final defence-line, about 500 yards from the north shore of Bairoko harbour. From the ridge, the Marines could plainly see the waters of the harbour – but their capture of the ridge proved to be a false triumph, for the Japanese lost no time in plastering it with a devastating 90-mm mortar fire, which they had until this time withheld. The Marines had no effective counterbattery weapons, and had to suffer these barrages without replying to them.

Nevertheless, the Marines continued to press forwards, and at 1600 hours they had struggled to within 300 yards north of the harbour – but they had shot their bolt. In the six-hour battle they had suffered 250 casualties; they had received no help from the air – nor from Schultz's battalion, stalled in the jungle almost 1,000 yards from where it was supposed to be. Freer's battalion, Liversedge's only reserve force, was strung out between Triri and Enogai, its energies almost wholly absorbed with ammunition supply and the evacuation of the growing number of wounded. And there was the very real danger that the Bairoko garrison would be heavily reinforced from Vila during the night. This, indeed, was the determining factor in Liversedge's decision to break off the fight.

So ended the battle for Bairoko. The Japanese had held on to their barge base; Liversedge's NLG held on at Enogai. Patrols sent out by both sides clashed sporadically and briefly – but both the Japanese and the Marines had been too badly hurt to renew the struggle.

It was stalemate for the NLG on Dragon's Peninsula – but by now Hester's forces were gaining the upper hand in the all-important battle for Munda. The efforts of the NLG had pinned down vital Japanese forces, preventing them from joining the defenders of Munda – and it was the Japanese collapse at Munda which finally broke the deadlock on Dragon's Peninsula. During the three nights of August 20/22, the Japanese evacuated Bairoko, shipping its defenders to Vila to defend Kolombangara.

The seizure of Enogai had been a brilliant small-scale operation; its sequel at Bairoko was distinguished by a series of miscalculations, blunders, and mishaps. Thanks to poor Intelligence, repeated failure of communications – and above all the lack of air support – the NLG was forced to fight itself to an exhausted standstill on Dragon's Peninsula. But without these sacrifices, the price of New Georgia and Munda – which was to prove the bloodiest struggle in the Solomons campaign – would undoubtedly have been far higher for the American forces, who now had to tackle another formidable obstacle: Bougainville.

## CONQUEST OF BOUGAINVILLE

The seizure of sites suitable for airfields on Bougainville, the largest island of the Solomons group, was an essential feature of MacArthur's Elkton plan. From such fields, Allied land-based fighters could provide needed escort to dive-bombers, medium

Paul Popper

In a captured Japanese bivouac, US wounded await evacuation

Paul Popper

Foxhole on Bougainville

bombers, and torpedo planes in the air campaign to neutralise Rabaul.

The strategic importance of Bougainville was as apparent to Japanese commanders as it was to MacArthur, Nimitz, and Halsey; and as early as March 1942, they had begun development of airfields on Buka Island (which lies off Bougainville's northern tip), at Tenekau and Kieta on the east coast, at Kahili and Kara on the south coast, and at Ballale in the Shortland Islands.

Halsey's first tentative plans called for seizure of the Shortlands, to be followed by a major assault against the Buin area. This was rejected when careful map and aerial photo studies clearly indicated that the Shortlands could not support the complex of airfields and installations deemed desirable. The next scheme advanced by the planners called for seizure of the Treasury Islands as a step preliminary to an amphibious assault either against Kieta (on the east coast), or in the Empress Augusta Bay region of the west coast.

Although Kieta was seriously considered, it was soon dropped as a possible target area, and attention was centred on Empress Augusta Bay. At first glance, a landing here seemed to have little to recommend it. The sea approaches were uncharted, and believed to be blocked by coral. The long, narrow beach was backed to a depth of several thousand yards by swamps, mangroves, and tangled undergrowth. Surf conditions were most unfavourable for small landing-craft. But—and this was the first decisive factor in selection of the Empress Augusta Bay area—there were practically no Japanese defenders there. Nor could General Harukichi Hyakutake readily deploy elements of his XVII Army to the scene from either Buin or Buka. And, as reconnaissance patrols landed from submarines reported, there were areas suitable for construction of major airfields.

In his defensive planning, Hyakutake had considered and rejected Empress Augusta Bay as a possible Allied target, and aside from a reinforced company at Cape Torokina, there were no Japanese closer than the garrisons at Kieta and Buin. The forbidding terrain, dense jungle, and almost complete lack of inland trails precluded any speedy intervention.

Allied Intelligence estimates of XVII Army strength and dispositions were remarkably accurate. These placed 5,000 troops in the Buka/Bonis area, 5,000 at Kieta, and 15,000—the VI Division, commanded by Lieutenant-General Masatane Kanda, at Buin. Additionally, Hyakutake's command had a naval complement defending the airfields at Kara, Kahili, and in the Shortlands. The Japanese VIII Fleet had provided him with almost 12,000 officers and men. Altogether, XVII Army carried almost 40,000 officers and men on its composite rolls in October 1943.

Aircraft deployed on Bougainville fields totalled almost 450. Of these, about 160 were Zeke fighters, and 240 were medium- and dive-bombers. The Imperial Navy based two cruisers, 10 destroyers, 12 transports, and 12 submarines at Buka.

### Halsey selects D-Day

Halsey made his final decision on October 1, and on that date notified MacArthur he would land in the Cape Torokina area. He set D-Day as November 1, 1943. Commander South-West Pacific approved both site and date. Code for the Empress Augusta Bay operation was 'Cherryblossom'; that of the projected 'D-5' operation to seize the Treasury Islands for installation of long-range radars, Operation 'Goodtime'.

Admittedly, strong enemy air and naval action might prejudice success. But the US 3rd Fleet was by this time sufficiently powerful to deal with Japanese surface forces, and Allied air power was competent to handle anything the Japanese air commander at Rabaul could muster.

Assault troops for Cherryblossom were drawn from I Marine Amphibious Corps (IMAC). This corps, consisting on paper of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Marine Divisions, actually had but one, the 3rd, available. The 1st was in MacArthur's command, and was intended by him to land in western New Britain in November. The 2nd had been selected for the first phase of the central Pacific campaign, the assault on the Gilbert Islands.

Another major US element assigned to IMAC for Cherryblossom was the US 37th Division. This division had been reorganising, re-equipping, and training since the conclusion of the Munda operation. Also assigned for Bougainville were the Marine Corps' 3rd Defence Battalion (in essence an anti-aircraft group), the 2nd Marine Raider Regiment, the US army 190th Coast Artillery Regiment (AA), and, in corps reserve, the 1st Marine Parachute Regiment.

IMAC at this time was commanded by Lieutenant-General Alexander A. Vandegrift; the 3rd Marine Division by Major-General Allen H. Turnage. The division, stationed on Guadalcanal, was well trained, in good physical condition, well equipped, and ready. The same may be said of the 7,000-man 8th New Zealand Brigade Group, commanded by Brigadier R. A. Row, slated to seize the Treasury Islands (Mono and Stirling) in Operation Goodtime on October 27.

A diversionary landing on Choiseul—Operation 'Blissful'—was to be executed at about the same time as Brigadier Row's Brigade Group hit Mono and Stirling. The 2nd Marine Parachute Battalion was selected for this operation. The commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Victor H. Krulak, was ordered to land from destroyer transports on Choiseul at midnight on October 27, create as much of an uproar as possible, and withdraw after about five days. This assignment perfectly suited Krulak, an imaginative and resourceful officer who had for several months been pleading for just this sort of off-beat employment.

The Treasury Islands, target for Row's New Zealanders, lie about 60 miles northwest of Vella Lavella, and some 20 miles south of the Shortlands. Halsey guessed that Row's operation would focus attention on the Shortlands/Buin area—and this it did. The New Zealanders landed on October 27, and were firmly established by the 31st. They crushed the last Japanese counterattacks on November 1, and spent the next ten days mopping up. Goodtime cost the New Zealanders almost 200 casualties (40 killed and 145 wounded), while attached American troops suffered 12 killed and 29 wounded. Over 200 Japanese bodies were found and buried, and eight prisoners taken.

While the New Zealanders were taking the Treasuries, the paratroops were raising hell on Choiseul. Krulak landed near Voza just after midnight on October 28, and in the next three days his patrols created a furore out of all proportion to their number. By November 1, however, the Japanese had discovered that the Allied operation was not a landing in force. On that day, Coast-Watcher C. W. Seton, RAN, who was with the Marines, received reports from native scouts that about 800 Japanese had assembled at Sangigai and were preparing to attack. In the face of this threat, Vandegrift ordered the paratroops to withdraw. This was accomplished on the night of November 3, without losses. In the meantime, the big show had been launched on Bougainville.

### Surprise at dawn

Allied activities in the Treasuries and on Choiseul had indeed fooled the Japanese, and confirmed them in the belief that the Shortlands/Buin area was the next target in the Solomons. The garrison at Torokina, expecting to be recalled to the Buin area at any moment, was therefore surprised at dawn, November 1, to find an armada standing off the Empress Augusta beaches. These were the ships of Rear-Admiral Theodore S. Wilkinson's Northern Force, lifting the assault echelon of 'Hal' Turnage's 3rd Marine Division.

The assault plan called for simultaneous landing of seven battalions on a beach front of something over 6,000 yards. At the same time, the 3rd Raider Battalion would go ashore on Puruata Island.

At 0715 hours, naval gunfire shifted to inland and flank target areas as 31 aircraft from Munda bombed and strafed the shoreline. At 0722 hours the first wave touched down and the 9th Marines (Colonel Edward A. Craig) began pouring over ramps and crossing the beaches north-west of the Koromokina river. The problem here was not the Japanese—there were none—but the pounding surf. By mid-morning 86 landing craft were stranded on the beach. Many of these were holed and half filled with water; others were damaged beyond repair.

Things were very different on the easterly beaches over which Colonel George W. McHenry's 3rd Marines landed. Here, surf was no problem—but Japanese were. The 1st Battalion 3rd Marines, landing at Torokina, stirred up a veritable hornets' nest. The defenders of the cape had numerous machine-guns and one 75-mm anti-boat gun. These opened as soon as the landing boats were within range. The second round from the anti-boat gun hit the boat group commander's boat, which sank. As the intensity of the fire increased, the boats tried to take evasive action. This produced a mêlée. Most boats, some damaged, made the beach, and troops disembarked under fire. The battalion commander had been severely wounded, and tactical integrity temporarily lost. But junior commanders, sergeants, and corporals responded quickly, and an hour after landing the battalion executive officer, who had assumed command, flashed: 'Situation is well in hand.' By mid-afternoon, the Marines had reduced a dozen bunkers. Over 150 Japanese dead were counted and given a mass burial.

Lieutenant-Colonel Fred D. Beans' 3rd Raiders had landed on Puruata at H-Hour. Although molested from time to time by several elusive light machine-gunners and a score of snipers, they soon had the situation under control at a cost of nine killed and 32 wounded. In the assault on Torokina, a lesson which Marines had learned earlier, albeit the US navy had as yet not, was repeated. This had to do with the general inefficiency and inaccuracy of preparatory and supporting naval gunfire. Had preparatory naval fire been accurate, it is safe to presume that half the Japanese bunkers—and there were 25, all heavily timbered—would have been destroyed. Marine gunfire planners would later write: 'The sad thing about the whole show was that the means actually were available to give us just what we wanted, but were dissipated in fruitless cannonading.'

Even before Marines were ashore at Torokina, the Japanese Area Command at Rabaul had reacted. Less than two hours after the transports appeared in the target area, a flight of some 30 Zekes came in. They were engaged by a New Zealand combat air patrol, which shot down seven. A few minutes later, high-level bombers, covered by fighters, attempted to attack the transports. Twelve of these were shot down and, shortly after noon, a flight of 70 enemy planes again attempted to attack shipping. US pilots shot five out of the air. In all, Allied fighters claimed 26 enemy; the actual count (from Japanese records) was 24. Four Allied planes were lost, but three pilots were pulled out of the water.

While these activities went on above, transports and cargo ships had sought the open sea, and were manoeuvring violently, covered by screen destroyers. All ships' AA guns engaged the bombers; destroyers claimed to have shot down four. There was no damage from the enemy, although one large transport ran aground. This temporarily concluded her frantic twistings and turnings.

During the wild scramble, unloading had, of course, ceased. This, as it turned out, was probably a good thing, for the shallow beaches, especially in the zone of the 9th Marines, were already overcrowded. The disorderly scene was further complicated by dozens of wrecked lighters and personnel boats. During the raids, the division's supply officer closed all beaches in the 9th Marines' zone, and shifted incoming cargoes to beaches east of the Koromokina river. Finally, in late afternoon, all bulk cargo was directed to Puruata.

### Naval battle off Empress Augusta

With the designated inland defence line—the first of numerous phase lines—manned, and with no enemy to contend with, the Marines would spend a relatively quiet night. Not so the sailors of Rear-Admiral Merrill's Task Force 39.

'Tip' Merrill's command, the Striking and Covering Force, consisted of the light cruisers *Montpelier, Cleveland, Columbia,* and *Denver,* and eight destroyers. All cruisers were equipped with search and fire-control radar. In the afternoon of November 1, Merrill received reports that a Japanese force of three heavy cruisers *(Myoko, Haguro, Agano),* one light cruiser *(Sendai),* and six destroyers was on the way, presumably to attack the transports. (These had of course withdrawn to the south after dusk.)

The Allied command had baited a neat trap, and Rear-Admiral S. Omori fell into it. Shortly after midnight, hostile blips first showed on the radars of the US screen destroyers: the Japanese were steaming in three widely separated columns. At 0230 hours, with targets closing fast, Merrill gave the signal to open fire. The battle was short, and for both sides confusing. But the great advantage of surprise, coupled with radar, gave the Americans a quick victory. In a few minutes the light cruiser *Sendai* and destroyer *Hatsukaze* went down. *Haguro, Miyako,* and the destroyer *Shiratsuyu* were heavily damaged. Omori withdrew. The damaged US destroyer *Foote* was taken in tow, and Merrill turned south.

At dawn, air cover arrived, and shortly thereafter, some 70 Japanese planes. The cruiser *Montpelier* was hit, but 17 Japanese fighters and bombers were shot down. The combined air-sea attempt to destroy the Empress Augusta beach-head had failed dismally. Upon return to Rabaul, Rear-Admiral Omori was relieved of his command.

The problem facing Major-General Turnage on D+1 Day was to expand the beach-head in depth as rapidly as possible, and so

# LEARNING JUNGLE WARFARE–THE HARD WAY

The US Marines were quick to adopt the tactics of the Japanese–and to learn from their own costly mistakes on New Georgia, scene of fumbling and confused combat. By the end of the battle for Bougainville, the US Marine was a veteran jungle soldier, skilled and battle-wise, capable of swift movement and the effective use of his weapons

US Army

secure enough real estate for the air facilities planned. Already airfield engineers were surveying Cape Torokina, an area deemed suitable for at least one fighter strip with dispersal areas and supporting facilities.

At the same time, Turnage contracted his frontages. The 9th Marines were pulled off the extreme left flank and moved toward Torokina. While this shuffling of battalions proceeded, the beach-head was deepened, and by D+5 Turnage held a beach-head almost 5,000 yards in depth, manned by five battalions. On the following morning the division's third regimental combat team, the 21st Marines, arrived and disembarked without incident. Division beaches were still in a disorganised state, and incoming cargo was delivered to Puruata.

At this point, Japanese Area Army HQ at Rabaul (which had grossly underestimated the strength of the invasion force) decided that something must be done to destroy the Allied beach-head. Accordingly, a composite battalion embarked in four destroyers on the night of November 6 and proceeded to Empress Augusta Bay. The Japanese had apparently planned to land at daybreak to the west of the Laruma river, organise, and then attack the extreme left flank of the Marine position. Why Rabaul conceived that a dawn landing in such inadequate strength could make much of a dent remains a mystery.

The Japanese landing-boats and barges were detected as they approached the beach, but morning mist, surf, and spray made identification practically impossible, and Marines in position at the mouth of the Koromokina river held their fire. The Japanese encountered the same surf conditions the Marines had previously. The result was that the battalion landing was dispersed along almost 3,000 yards of beach west of the Koromokina. But the Japanese company which landed just west of the river wasted no time. Nor did the Marines. By 0800 hours hot fire was being exchanged. By early afternoon two Marine battalions were on the scene. And by this time, the Japanese who had landed near the Laruma arrived to join the battle, which lasted until dusk. Marine artillery now came down on located positions. Rifles and light machine-guns fired sporadically throughout the night, and at dawn on November 8, artillery concentrations began to fall on the Japanese. As the fire lifted, the Marines moved in, meeting little concerted opposition. Artillery and mortar fire had killed 250 Japanese, and the survivors fled into the bush. Altogether the Japanese had suffered about 400 casualties in this abortive exercise, which marked the last serious attempt they would make against the beach-head for some time.

The US perimeter was pushed inland and, as the battle subsided in the coconut grove at the trail junction, Turnage's landing force held a beach-head with a base of 7,000 yards and a depth of some 5,000 yards. And during this time his command had almost doubled, as elements of the US army's 37th Division (Major-General Robert S. Beightler) arrived. Altogether, in a five-echelon lift (November 1, 6, 8, 11, and 13), the US navy put almost 34,000 combat and service troops and more than 23,000 tons of supplies ashore.

One problem, however, caused the Allied command considerable concern: practically no progress had been made on construction of the fighter strip at Torokina. The difficulty was that the energies and equipment of the 19th Marines (engineers) were totally absorbed in the struggle to prepare supply routes leading from beach areas to forward positions. At the time of the initial landing, no such routes existed. The only tracks were primitive ones leading out of Cape Torokina. The terrain in the remainder of the area enclosed by the Allied inland defence line was practically all knee-deep swamp in which jeeps practically disappeared.

### Roadways through the swamp

Actually, a real supply crisis would have occurred had it not been for the presence of a reinforced battalion of amphibious vehicles – LVTs, or Landing Vehicles, Tracked. The LVT, development of which the Marine Corps had consistently encouraged, provided the means – for the first two and a half weeks of the operation, the *only* means – of assured supply and evacuation. Dozens of these vehicles plodded through the swamps as the engineers, working from dawn to dark, slowly pushed ballasted roadways forward.

For front-line troops, there were no amenities. Limited water and cold rations were their lot for almost the first month of Cherryblossom. There was no opportunity to bathe for days on end. Fortunately, the combat situation was such that battalions could be rotated out of forward positions with reasonable frequency. While there was fighting – and some bitter fighting took place during the first two weeks on Bougainville – the unrelenting struggle in which every officer and man participated for 24 hours a day was against nature.

### The clash for 'Cibik Ridge'

As of November 18, Marine patrols had uncovered strong defences between Numa Numa trail and the forks of the Piva river. This information was gained only at the expense of vicious in-fighting, often at distances of less than 25 yards, and involved all three battalions of the 3rd Marines. The Japanese strong point, first engaged by the 2nd Battalion, consisted of a complex of 18 bunkers, organised in depth. In the first assault, the Marines suffered severely, and withdrew several hundred yards to reorganise.

In the meantime, a patrol commanded by Lieutenant Steve J. Cibik had swung around the Japanese right and occupied a precipitous hill about 400 feet high well in the Japanese rear. This dominating feature, which the Japanese believed safe, served them as an observation post. The Americans were not slow to realise the importance of 'Cibik Ridge', as this feature was immediately named. Nor were the Japanese. Even as the Marines reinforced the position from the north, the Japanese attacked repeatedly from south and east. Both sides were aware that Cibik Ridge was the key to the larger fight that was in the making. Cibik, now commanding a conglomerate force, hung on in the face of a series of desperate attacks. By November 23, Marine artillery observers and tactical air direction teams were on the ridge. This was the beginning of the end for the Japanese on Bougainville.

The struggle, recorded in operational histories as the 'Battle of Piva Forks', was over by November 26. Marines held Cibik Ridge and nearby high ground – dubbed 'Grenade Hill' because of the close-range grenading and counter-grenading that characterised its seizure. The nine-day battle in the jungle cost the Japanese over 1,200 killed.

The troops had not yet taken the real estate IMAC needed for its projected airfields: this required another extension of the perimeter to inland defence line H. This occupied the Marines and army from December 9 to the day after Christmas 1943. By mid-January, the 3rd Marine Division had been relieved by the American Division of the US army, and was redeployed to Guadalcanal.

By January 9, Piva bomber and fighter fields were fully operational. By this time, Torokina had been in business for almost a month, and a fourth field had been completed on Stirling Island in the Treasuries.

In terms of casualties suffered, Bougainville does not, happily, claim much space in the listings. Marines suffered less than 2,000, the Japanese about 2,500. The prize was won at such relatively small cost because the Allied command, which had learned much from the slugging at Munda, had adopted Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest's axiom: 'Git thar fustest with the mostest.' The days of Rabaul – and thus of the Japanese position in the southern seas – were numbered.

## Guadalcanal to Bougainville

**1943** **February 9:** US forces complete the conquest of Guadalcanal.
**February 21:** US forces occupy the Russell Islands (Operation 'Cleanslate').
**March 2/5:** Battle of the Bismarck Sea. Allied aircraft bomb Japanese transports attempting to reinforce New Guinea.
**April 26:** General MacArthur issues 'Elkton III', superseding previous 'Elkton' plans. This calls for Operation 'Cartwheel' – co-ordinated drives in South and South-West Pacific towards Rabaul.
**June 21:** US Marines open the Central Solomons campaign with landings at Segi, New Georgia, with Munda airfield as the main target.
**July 5:** Northern Landing Group lands on New Georgia.
**July 5/6:** US and Japanese destroyers and cruisers clash in the Battle of Kula Gulf.
**August 5/6:** US forces capture Munda airfield; Japanese resistance crumbles.
**August 20/22:** Japanese evacuate northern New Georgia.
**November 1:** US forces land on Bougainville, last major target in the Solomons campaign.
**December 9/26:** Last big US push on Bougainville ensures the Allied hold of air bases on Bougainville.

BRIGADIER-GENERAL SAMUEL B. GRIFFITH was born in Lewistown, Pennsylvania, and grew up in a suburb of Pittsburg. Studying at the US Naval Academy in 1929, he was to serve in China, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Britain before the Second World War. He was wounded in the Battle of Guadalcanal, but returned to action in the New Georgia campaign in July/August 1943. He holds the Navy Cross and the Army Distinguished Service Cross. Among General Griffith's post-war assignments were those of Provost-Marshal of North China, and Chief-of-Staff, Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic. When he retired in 1956 he was on the staff of the US C-in-C Europe. General Griffith gained his PhD in Chinese Military History at New College, Oxford, in 1961. His books include *The Battle for Guadalcanal* (Lippincott, USA), *Sun Tzu's Art of War*, and a translation of *Mao Tse-Tung on Guerilla Warfare*, as well as numerous articles.

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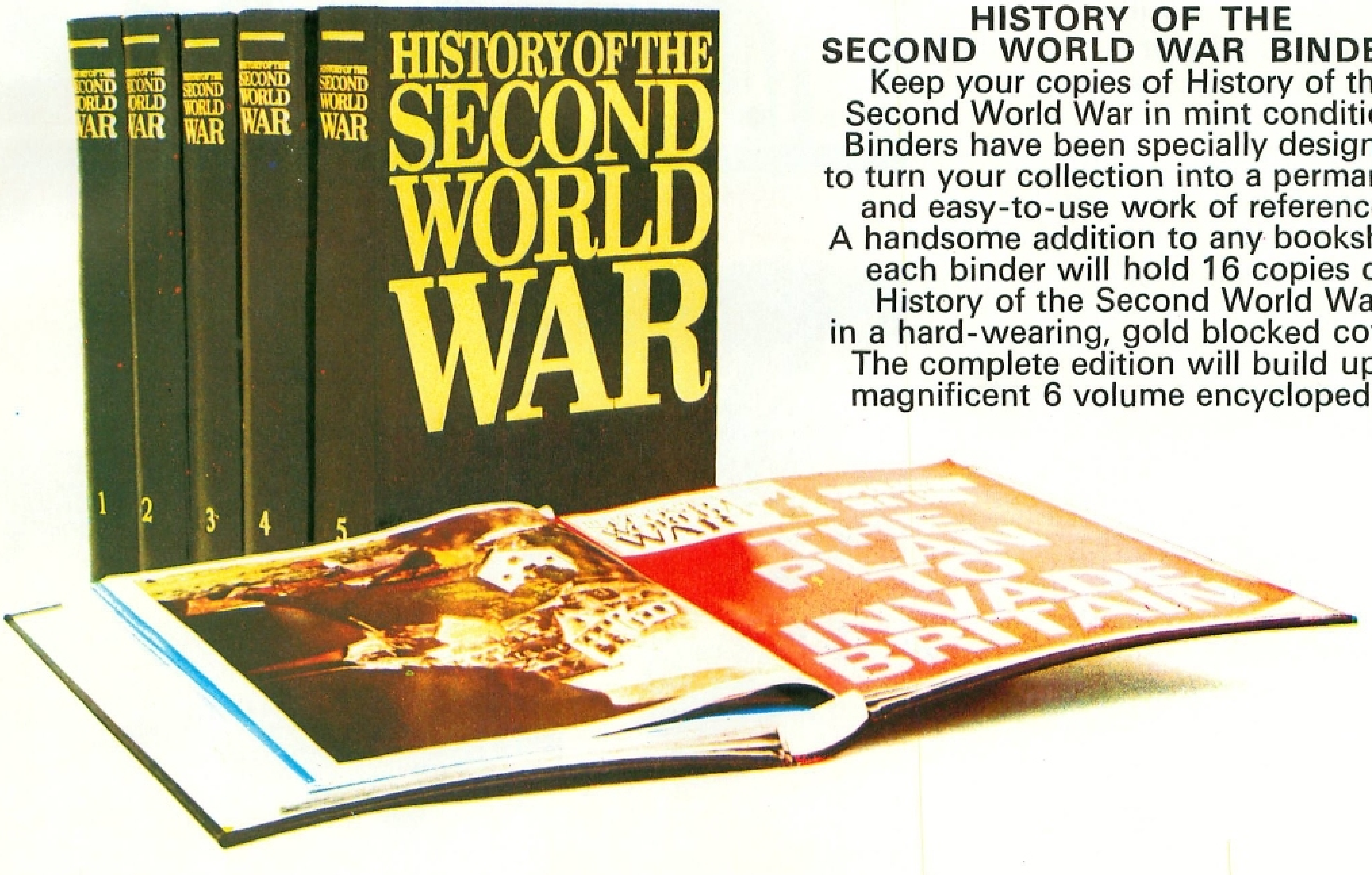

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